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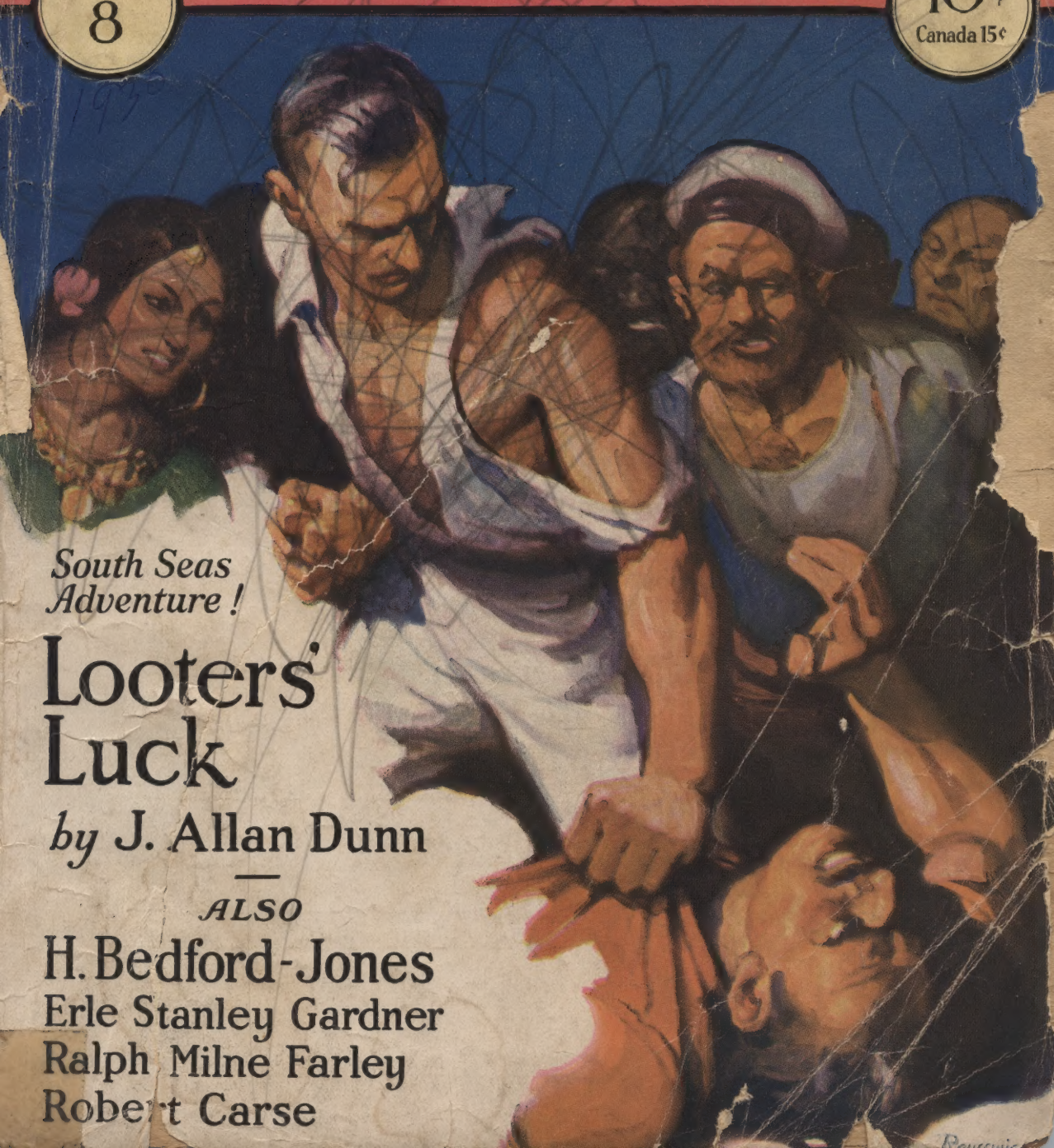

South Seas Adventure!

Looters' Luck

by J. Allan Dunn

—

ALSO

H. Bedford-Jones

Erle Stanley Gardner

Ralph Milne Farley

Robert Carse

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*Based on the combined experiences of F. B. Englehardt, Chattanooga, Tenn.; A. F. Thompson, Sioux City, Iowa; L. D. Mathers, of E. Cleveland, Ohio, and many others.

Caught in a Rut

I wonder I put up with it as long as I did! Every day was filled with nothing but deadly routine and monotonous detail. No freedom or independence. No chance to get out and meet people, travel, nor have interesting experiences. I was just like a cog in a big machine with poor prospects of ever being anything more.

Long, Tiresome Hours

Every hour of the day I was under somebody's supervision. The TIME-CLOCK constantly laid in wait for me—a monument to unfulfilled hopes and dying ambition. Four times a day, promptly on the dot, it hurled its silent challenge at my self-respect, reminding me how unimportant I was and how little I really COUNTED in the business and social world!

Low Pay

Paid just enough to keep going—but never enough to enjoy any of the GOOD things of life every man DESERVES for his family and himself. Always economizing and pinching pennies. Always wondering what I would do if I were laid off or lost my job. Always uncertain and apprehensive of the future.

Desperate

Happened to get a look at the payroll one day and was astonished to see what big salaries went to the sales force. Found that salesman Brown made $200 a week—and Jenkins $275! Would have given my right arm to make money that fast, but never dreamed I had any "gift" for salesmanship.

A Ray of Light

Stumbled across an article on salesmanship in a magazine that evening. Was surprised to discover that salesmen were made and not "born" as I had foolishly believed. Read about a former cowpuncher, Wm. Shore of California, making $525 in one week after learning the ins-and-outs of scientific salesmanship. Decided that if HE could do it, so could I!

The Turning Point

My first step was to write for a certain little book which a famous business genius has called "The MOST AMAZING BOOK EVER PRINTED". It wasn't a very *big* book, but it certainly opened my eyes to things I had never *dreamed* of—and proved the turning point of my entire career!

What I Discovered

Between the pages of this remarkable volume, I discovered hundreds of little known facts and secrets that revealed the REAL TRUTH about the science of selling! It wasn't a bit as I had imagined. I found out that it was governed by simple rules and laws that almost ANY man can master as easily as he learned the alphabet. I even learned how to go about getting into this "highest paid of all professions". I found out exactly how Mark Barichievich of San Francisco was enabled to quit his $8 a week job as a restaurant worker and start making $125 a week as a salesman; and how C. W. Birmingham of Dayton, Ohio, jumped from $15 a week to $7500 a year—these and *hundreds* of others! It certainly *was* a revelation!

FREE Employment Service

Furthermore, I discovered that the National Salesmen's Training Association, which published the book, also operates a most effective employment service! Last year they received requests from all over the U. S. and Canada for more than 50,000 salesmen trained by their method. This service is FREE to both members and employers and thousands have secured positions this way!

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Get Your Copy FREE

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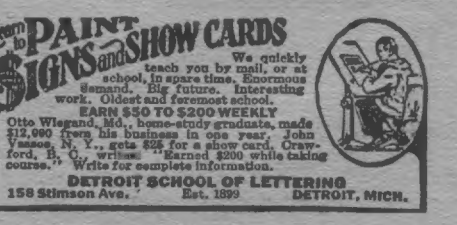

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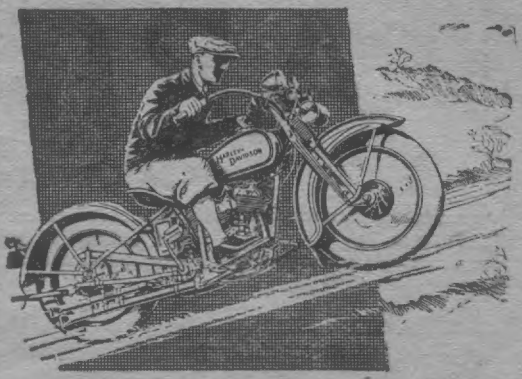

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ARGOSY
ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

VOLUME 210 SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 1930 NUMBER 5

"Remember," Wing warned, "there are Chinese everywhere"

Looters' Luck

The Duke was a gentleman and Ginger a Sydney dock bully—but they were fellow buccaneers when it was a question of a South Seas pearl hoard

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Glamour of Gold," "Beyond the Law," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A PRIZE IN SIGHT.

LUCK was with them, with the "Duke" (Monty Allerton) and "Ginger" (Bill Harris). The latter hailed from Sydney; the Duke from England—some said Oxford.

They were wading in luck, up to their necks.

But there are two kinds of luck—good and bad. Theirs was the wrong kind. The Duke described it as "beastly," Ginger termed it "lousy." There, in a way, you sight the difference between the two. Nothing languid,

though, about the Duke when he got into action; and plenty of force about Harris. Ginger's moniker did not merely describe the color of his hair that bearded him, crowned him, bechested him, furred his legs and arms and fingers.

Plenty of other distinctions between the two rogues. They were linked by their rascality. Between them they had no more conscience than a hungry land-crab.

But things had gone wrong, so badly that the Duke swore there must shortly be a change from the remorseless flood of misfortune that had foundered their fortunes, and left them stranded at Papeete. Their schooner was tied up with debts, their credit rotten, and the two of them were not many jumps from becoming beach combers, or even being deported by the French Colonial Government, which was beginning to look upon them with too cold official eyes.

First, there had been the affair in which the Duke had rooked the young American, Bliss, out of the copra plantation of which Bliss had become tired, coming to Tahiti to sell it and losing it to the Duke at poker. They had gone to the island rejoicing—to find it devastated by a hurricane that nearly wrecked their ship, the Hihimanu.

Then there had been the game at the Bougainvillæa Club. Ginger was too clumsy to cheat; the Duke had been afraid to. Their reputations were none too good. There were a lot of rumors against them, smuggling dope, poaching pearls and shell; and two men in the game had sharp eyes. After all, the club was one place the Duke must hang on to, as long as he could scrape up the money for his chits.

He had relied, optimistically enough, on his superior skill, on Ginger's assistance, to squeeze some "mark" between them. But they had missed the mark. The cards had gone against them. The Duke went down on four jacks, honestly acquired, against a three-card draw that materialized into four queens.

Last blow of all was the secret information of a lagoon full of gold-tipped shell. They had had to strain their credit to outfit. The lagoon was really there, and so was the pearl—but borers had got at it. It was not worth the wages of the crew, which the pair still owed. The devil of it was they had to wait for the rotting-out before they found out the shell was valueless.

THAT had finished them. They could not find any one to put up a barratry bond. The Hihimanu, smartest and fastest schooner in Papeete, would be sold shortly for the claims against it. Their present capital was something less than a hundred francs—four dollars.

Their personal belongings, save for the few clothes the Duke had got ashore (and without his front he was derelict) were still aboard. Things were at a desperate pass. They couldn't be worse. Therefore, according to the Duke's philosophy, they were sure to mend.

Meantime, they did the best they could; and it was not much. They took it according to type. Ginger hung around certain disreputable groggeries and shanghai joints. The Duke ran his chits to the limit at the club. He preserved his immaculate appearance though he had to do his own laundering and ironing. Ginger didn't care how he looked; that was apparent.

A ship had come in, with tourists, from the States. Most, if not all of them, would pass on with the boat. It

was a South Sea tour and the Duke knew the pickings might be slim. Still, there should be a dinner or so worked by his suave mode of making acquaintances, his manners and accent, his monocle and tales of the South Seas.

Some one might play cards—or billiards. The Duke was so good with the cue that the locals left him alone when it came to betting. They were inclined to frown on him at the Hôtel de Sud, but he had not yet requested to become a guest or else relinquish the privilege of its lounge, its *lanais*—verandas—and its band concerts.

He did not overdo the thing. The steamer came in during the late afternoon. He gave them time to get their rooms, change, settle down. And then, clad in clean, well-pressed linen, his Lahaina panama with its blue and white puggaree perched above his clean-cut countenance, his eyeglass in place, the Duke strolled in the grounds at dinner time, up to the lounge, and looked over prospective prey.

He was an expert at this sort of thing, but he didn't see many openings. The tourists were round-trippers, passengers on a line that went round the world, gave them stop-overs. It was less expensive than living ashore, for most of them, and the Duke sized them up as a cheap lot. The majority had their wives along, and wives were suspicious of South Sea ports. They were not going to let hubby out of their sight.

The luck was still wrong.

He took a comfortable chair, close to the desk, and watched the stairs, the elevator. Bland, clean-shaved, broad of shoulders, lean of waist; his clothes well-cut, copied by a local Chinaman from the models the Duke had brought. His glance seemed indifferent.

Then a gleam came into his eyes. A girl had gone to the clerk. She was a pretty girl, modern, American, trim of figure and raiment. The Duke liked women, but only for amusement or profit. This sort he passed up. There was a young man with her, also American, obviously in love, perhaps her fiancé.

It was the talk that interested the Duke's sharp ears. Especially the name. His were well-shaped ears though inclined to be pointed at the top, like a faun's. And they missed little.

"I am Miss Farleigh," said the girl. "I am stopping off here for awhile. I wonder if you could tell me where I can charter a schooner. I wish to make a trip."

The clerk, speaking French and English both, was obsequious. He had noticed the fine diamond on the girl's engagement finger. He knew the rooms she had engaged.

The Duke had seen the ring also. He sized up her escort, his face, person, clothes. Clean-cut American. Rich. But his interest remained with the girl. He polished his eyeglass.

"THERE are one or two schooners in the harbor, Miss Farleigh," said the clerk. "The pearling fleet has left for the opening of the lagoons in the Puamotus. Did you want to go there?"

"No."

She spoke decisively, and curtly; she was not giving out unnecessary information. She did not have to, to the Duke. The clerk was a recent arrival, and her name meant nothing, to him.

"You could see the skippers," the clerk went on. "I don't know just where you could find them." His glance roved to the Duke, passed over him. He did not look much like the clerk's idea

of a South Sea skipper, or any one's preconceived idea, for that matter. Just then the Duke saw the manager strolling up and decided to efface himself.

He got up with apparent but deceptive slowness, and slid back of a tall potted palm on his way out. He heard the girl's escort say:

"I'll look them up for you, first thing in the morning, Thelma."

The "Thelma" did not interest the Duke, but the eight letters of the name Farleigh spelled a million to him. It looked as if the luck was changing at last, as if a break was coming—if he could make a powerful effort with it.

There were three vessels available, ranged along the coral wall of Papeete wharf. Two were copra carriers, packers of *bêche-de-mer* and sharks' fins, hawkbill turtle and dried swallows' nests. Their skippers were hard-boiled seagoers who had long ago passed up the lottery of pearl lagoons for more certain profits, if more unsavory cargoes.

Neither compared with the Hihimanu, for elegance or speed. Both things desirable for Thelma Farleigh and her fiancé, the Duke fancied. But they would shy at the embargo, at being asked to put up three thousand dollars for a barratry bond, over and above the charter money. It would sound fishy; and inquiry would bring out stories that might throw the choice another way. And that must not be. Not with a fortune in plain sight—as it was to the Duke, shining and beckoning.

If his ship—his and Ginger's—was clear, no one in Tahiti would tell tales. The Duke and Ginger, plus credit, were men to be handled politely. They were disliked but feared. With their accounts in the black, nobody was going to mention things. But in the red—that was different, the Duke told himself. A lot of rats, these colonial officials and their gendarmerie, with others in town willing to kick a dog with a bad name—or two dogs; tie cans to them, fasten rocks about their necks, drown them.

In brief, he *had* to get hold of seventy-five thousand francs before morning. Three thousand American dollars. He could multiply it many times inside of a few days.

He was desperate enough for any racket. He would have cheerfully held up anybody for the three thousand; but no one carried that amount around in Tahiti. The Duke was not a bank robber. But some one had to come through. It was a break—and what a break!

Farleigh had guarded the secret of his location so long—and here was a girl, presumably his daughter, spilling it voluntarily. The Duke did not doubt the relationship. There was likeness enough to prove it. He had seen Farleigh only two or three times, but he had not forgotten him. Not likely to. An unusual man. This girl had the same features, modified: well-shaped nose, gray eyes, the same mold of forehead and lift of chin. Clever and efficient, no doubt, as well as attractive. Farleigh was very far from a fool.

A break for the Duke—but seventy-five thousand francs to get, somehow.

HE went in search of Ginger, finding him on the first chance, at Lefty Turk's. Turk ran a water front saloon and boarding house, and provided crews for skippers who were short of men because of Papeete's fascinations. He was a broken-nosed individual who hailed from Seattle and looked like a prize fighter, but was only a thug who had found a soft berth in

Tahiti and made money by any devious way that showed.

Ginger was playing solitaire with a bottle of beer in front of him. He was in a morose mood and did not look up when the Duke came in. The latter glanced at him and then passed on to the rear where Turk hung out in his sanctum.

Turk had a woman with him and the Duke called him outside. He came none too willingly. There was something compelling about the Duke that Turk resented. He was glad to think the Duke was in straits, though they had been partners together in certain shady affairs.

The Duke baffled him. His clean linen and his airs offended the rough and ready Turk, his eyeglass made the thug sick; but he was a little afraid of the Britisher, and sore at himself because he felt that way. An indefinable feeling, one that aroused resentment and counseled caution. He was never quite sure who was the better man—nor was he eager to put it to a test.

Girls came in to Turk's, on occasion, to dance with his customers. Half-whites and natives, unmoral but generally comely. The one with him was named Pinao—which is Tahitian for dragon-fly—and Turk fancied her. She had been teasing him and Turk was not amiable. The Duke saw that, but he had to strike while irons were hot, no matter how the sparks flew. He came straight to the point.

"I want three thousand dollars to lift that barratry business," he said. "I'll give you five for it inside of a month."

"Offer me ten an' you couldn't git it," said Turk.

"I might make it ten. It's what you jolly well call a cinch, Turk."

"For you. I free yore hooker an' you go out an' clear up a deal. How do I know you'll come back? Then where's my three thousand?"

"We'll come back," said the Duke. "I've never cheated you yet."

"Not yet," said Turk. He grinned. He had the Duke where he wanted him, begging for a favor. He didn't trust him. He wouldn't have trusted himself. And here was the chance to score off the other's superiority.

"'Tis only becos I've been too smart fer you," he said. "You've gypped plenty. I've never been a sucker yet, an' I don't aim to be."

The Duke took the monocle from his eye and stowed it carefully away. It had no cord.

"Did you say 'gypped'?" he said smoothly.

"You heard me. You're a crook an' you know it. You've come to the end of your rope an' you think I'll be your life-saver. You can go to hell."

The Duke glanced through the crack of the half-open door and saw Pinao. He understood Turk's rancor a little better. He knew that Pinao would come to his own nod, running. But not yet to Turk's.

He stripped off his coat swiftly, in one even movement. He was not going to have a swine like Turk call him a 'gyp' and a crook. Under the thin shirt his torso showed for what it was, that of a born athlete. The Duke seldom drank too much, never overate, and kept always fit.

Turk swung at him before he was quite free of sleeves and the Duke ducked.

"Not sportin'," the Duke said without outward rancor and drove his left hard to Turk's right kidney as Turk swung around with the miss. "Not a bit sportin'."

Ginger was up by now, with three or

four other loungers. The red-haired one held them back.

"Let the Duke trim the blighter," he said. "It won't be long."

He had seen the Duke in action plenty of times. There was speculation in many ports as to which would win, if it ever came to a battle between the two partners. Ginger was almost as long-armed as a chimpanzee, strong as a bull, hard as rubber and whalebone. He lacked the Duke's science, his niceties of sportsmanship. Those did not count, according to Ginger. You fought a man to lick him, the quickest way possible—and to make him stay licked.

TURK had a gun in his back pocket and the Duke knew it. It was too hot for most people to wear coats or Turk would have packed his weapon in a shoulder holster. He retreated, feeling for the weapon. He was overfat and the automatic, flat as it was, wouldn't come out too easily as he moved backward, tugging at it.

It took away his right hand and, with the Duke against him, that was fatal.

"*Not* sportin'," said the Duke again and smashed Turk where his ribs parted, following up with two uppercuts that left Turk lying across a table.

Turk was a tough article and his jaw was not made of glass. He abandoned the gun he was in no position to draw, seized a chair and tried to bludgeon the Duke.

The Duke side-stepped, nimble as a fencer or a final-bouter. He could have done a dozen things to Turk then, but he got him by the front of his collar and dragged him upright, left-handed, after he had torn the chair free and chucked it in a corner. He held his man, measuring him and then whipped up a punch from the hip that went to the button of Turk's rockbound jaw with a finality that was not to be resisted.

Turk's eyes went glassy. His feet slid out from him. His elbows struck the table as he fell, like an unskillful skater. The back of his head struck the edge of the wood. He was down—and out.

"Unethical, a bit, holdin' him," said the Duke. "But he went outside the book. I like to have my men on their feet when I finish them," he added, putting on his coat and taking his monocle out again.

The half-white girl had been watching with glowing eyes.

"Look after him, Pinao," said the Duke.

She laughed.

"That fat peeg! I look after heem. A damn long way after, you betcha life. You like I come weeth you, *kapitani?*"

"Not to-night, *huapala;* I'm terribly busy."

He walked out past the bar. The man there leaned over the counter.

"He'll do you in fer that," the fellow prophesied vindictively. "He's got plenty on you two—"

Whatever epithet he had in his throat died out at the sight of the Duke's eyes, blue, the one back of the eyeglass little colder than the other. At the look of Ginger's green ones, shot with brown flecks, the barman quite regretted his speech.

"I know a thing or two myself," said the Duke. "Listen."

He spoke a few words in a low tone. The other wilted.

"Just mention that to Turk," Duke concluded. "Come on, Ginger."

They walked out into the fragrant night. The moon sailed high over the

fantastic peaks, silvered the harbor, touched the island at the entrance. The wind rustled through the palms, bringing balmy odors of the bush, night-flowers, fragrant vines. It meant nothing to either of them. They were not romantic.

"What was the row about?" asked Ginger. "You did 'im in proper, but you should 'ave busted 'is blarsted ribs while you 'ad the chance."

"I tried to touch him for three thousand dollars," said the Duke. "We've got to get them somewhere, to-night."

Ginger whistled.

"Why didn't you ask 'im for 'is right eye? He turned me down for a shot of whisky to-night. I 'ad to pay cash for a bottle of beer. I'd 'ave walked out on 'im only I fancied you might be along and I didn't want to 'ear 'im laugh if I left. I'd a mind to slug 'im myself. What did you whisper in Mike's ear?"

"He overdosed a sailor, the bally crimp," said the Duke. "The man died and I happen to know it. None of my business until to-night. None now, unless he gets nasty. We've got to get that money, Ginger."

"Fat charnce! You lose again at the club?"

"No. This hasn't got a thing to do with losing. Farleigh's daughter is here. Came this afternoon. She wants to charter a ship to go out to him."

"SHE knows where the island is?" Ginger was tense.

"There are times, Ginger, when you are a trifle slow. Naturally she does. He wouldn't tell any one else, but he's told her. It means he's cleaned up, or else she's paying him an unexpected visit. It doesn't matter. The point is she's bound there—and we're taking her."

"And where are you goin' to get the 'ready'?"

"There's only one place. Wing Lee. He'll want a third. That's why I tried Turk first. He's got the money, and I might have talked him into it if that girl hadn't been there."

"It's wimmen," said Ginger, "who spoil every lay, one way or another."

"It's a girl who's going to make our fortunes."

"Wing Lee 'll want 'arf."

"He'll take a third. He's fair enough. He stands back of his word. I don't want to give him a hundred thousand, but there's no one else."

"Francs?"

"*Dollars.* I've seen some of Farleigh's pearls he sold when he came here. I've heard the talk of his crew—Pinao told me that. He must have a quarter of a million dollars at least. It might be twice that. You'll find Wing Lee knows about it. There isn't a thing goes on between here and New Guinea that that yellow-hided Solomon doesn't know about."

"Gord! 'Arf a million!" The apostrophe to the Deity was at once prayer and invocation as well as tribute to Ginger's idolatry for wealth. The figures staggered him a bit. But the Duke, as always, knew what he was about.

"We'll walk out," said the Duke. "Wing likes things done quietly."

The shadows of the palms densely lining the Beach Road, smooth of pounded coral, received them. One or two cars passed them and they slipped in between the graceful trunks. At last they turned off, up a lane lined with hibiscus blossoms that would die at midnight. They came to the gateway of a low bungalow set in a garden of crotons, *frangipanni, ylang-ylang,* shaded with papayas, palms, mangoes, and avocado trees.

A Chinese boy, appearing from nowhere, felt-footed, sleek, cautious, was on the wide *lanai* before they reached its steps.

"Wing Lee," said the Duke. "Tell him it's Allerton."

"All li'. You wait."

They were conscious of observation though they could not place it.

"'E's blamed mysterious," said Ginger grumpily.

"He's a downy old Oriental owl," said the Duke.

CHAPTER II.

WING LEE.

THE Duke's simile was apt. Wing Lee looked like an owl. He cared nothing about the new regulations of the Chinese Republic, for Wing was a self-centered man. He wore a cue, hanging low; but the rest of his skull was either bald or clean-shaved, smooth as a billiard ball that had yellowed with time.

His eyes, full of wisdom, looked from behind big lenses at his visitors, unblinkingly, magnified, hypnotic. His eyelids were as unwrinkled as the nictitating membranes of that night-flying bird. His neck was sunk in the collar of his blouse of silk brocade. His yellow hands, exquisitely kept, were thin, the fingers like claws, four long nails incased in protectors of filigreed gold.

He received them in a room that ran the entire width of his bungalow, at the back. Here Tahiti was remote; they were in China. Wing sat in a thronelike, elaborately carved chair of teak before a teakwood table, partly covered with an embroidered strip of silk, the design bordered with ideographs.

There were thick rugs on the floor, wall-hangings on the panels. At one end of the room was a stone god before which candles burned in holders of silver on either side of an incense burner.

There were two attendants, mute and still as automata, their arms folded, their hands concealed in their long sleeves, clad in blue-black blouses and pantaloons, felt slippered, the insignia of the house of Wing on their backs in dull red. That they were armed, the Duke did not doubt.

He was at ease, bowing from the hips, to which Wing responded with an inclination of the head; but he felt the far-reaching power of the Chinese. Beside that of Wing, he knew his own chicanery was child's-play. He had sensed, long ago, that Wing knew all about him, saw through his masquerade, despised him for a small-time adventurer in comparison with the magnitude of his own operations.

Ginger stood like a gorilla that has been dressed up; enormous, belligerent. He felt the atmosphere of the place also and resented it though he, too, knew well enough the resources of Wing.

"What do you want?" asked Wing in his close-clipped, precise English, that elided no r's, made no errors.

"Three thousand dollars, as a stake for perhaps a hundred times that sum," said the Duke.

"You will please tell me all about it."

The Duke had a consciousness of futility, almost of childishness. He would make a heavy winning, enough to take him to places more congenial to a man of his tastes than the South Seas, yet he knew he was a mere pawn to Wing, even if he condescended to play the game.

He believed that Wing knew most

of what he was about to tell him, even, possibly, the arrival of the girl. Yet he held a good card or two. He owned, or hoped he would soon regain, the schooner. He had the needed personality; even if Wing engineered this deal, he would have to use the Duke. A yellow skin had its limitations in a play like this.

"Raymond Farleigh has been coming to Tahiti for the past ten years," the Duke said. "On every occasion he has sold some pearls. They have been exceptional gems. A great many have tried to find out the place he finds them, but no one has succeeded, unless you know."

The wise eyes revealed nothing.

"They are good pearls," said Wing. "I have bought some of them."

If Wing had known the position of the island he would have done something in the matter, the Duke reflected, gaining confidence as he went on.

"His daughter arrived this afternoon. She is staying at the Hôtel de Sud. She had a young chap with her who acted as if he was her lover, if not her fiancé. She wants to charter a schooner to go to the island."

"You are sure of that?"

The Duke had no doubt of it until that moment. He did not let it show now, though he had not the impassive features of Wing. He had a good poker face of his own, but Wing's bland immobility was worth a fortune.

"I heard her talking," he said. Wing clapped his hands. A section of paneling slid noiselessly back and a Chinaman in white appeared. He, too, wore glasses. He was deferential, kowtowing to Wing, bowing in less degree to the Duke and Ginger. The latter grunted.

Wing talked to him in sing-song and the secretary flexed again and left.

"Go on," said Wing.

"There are only three schooners here. You know that. Mine is the best ship in every way, will appeal to Farleigh's girl. It is embargoed for three thousand dollars, and that might well prove an obstacle to their chartering, might cause talk. If you will clear me, I can get her to charter the Hihimanu. The rest is simple."

"WHAT makes you think Farleigh has a fortune in pearls on his island?"

Wing had set finger on the flaw. The Duke held no certainty, but he did not believe Wing would have listened thus far without reason for extending the audience.

"It is probable. A gamble, of course. But he seems to have sold only enough to take care of his expenses. He would not want to flood the market."

"There are pearls on his island," said Wing. "That I know. We will talk further. . . . How do you propose to obtain them—by force? Farleigh is a clever man. Without doubt he has guarded his secret well; he has thought that others might seek to despoil him. As a man ages, if he has wisdom, so he learns the value of silence. Farleigh is wise. He has men with him. He will have arms. He who undervalues an enemy may find himself a fool."

"His men are not fighters," said the Duke. "My crew are. And it will not be a question of guns. We shall have the girl."

"And her fiancé."

The Duke snapped his fingers. "He does not count."

"There is not a worthless card in any deck," said Wing. "You propose to play the queen—to win. You will give me a third. Harris is, I presume,

your partner. Equal shares for all of us; save that you will repay me what I advance, if I do so."

"A quarter," said the Duke. Wing remained silent.

"You'll buy the pearls from us?"

"Whatever pearls you bring back I will pay cash for, according to their fair market value, but that will not include matched pearls. Each gem will be considered separately."

The Duke considered. Harris growled dissent. Matched pearls doubled, sometimes trebled, in value. Wing was driving a shrewd bargain. He would give them local values and would resell abroad. His third would be nearer half. But he had them in a cleft stick; he was their last resource.

The panel slid aside after a stroke from an unseen gong. The secretary reappeared. He spoke shortly with Wing and left, noiselessly.

"Your information appears correct," said Wing.

Without doubt he had sent a messenger to the Hôtel de Sud, probably on a bicycle. There were no telephone wires along the Beach Road.

There was a Chinese chef, Chinese help in the hotel kitchen. Little went on there that Wing could not find out.

The Duke breathed a little easier.

"You will want stores," said Wing. "I will advance thirty-five hundred dollars. Do not forget to return. Do not forget that there are Chinese everywhere, except, perhaps, on Farleigh's island."

"I'm not such a fool," the Duke answered. "I can sell the pearls best and quickest to you, even if you get a quarter share."

"A third."

"A third then; on your own terms. You can trust me, Wing."

"I can trust myself, my own organization. You will, I am quite sure, return. But there is one more condition."

"What is it?"

"You will ship only the men I provide. They will come to you with my seal on paper."

"I can't handle Chinese. I have my own men. They haven't been paid off from the last trip. There may be a bit of a row, and my men are fighters."

"Mine also," said Wing. "And they will not be all Chinese. It is a bargain. I am busy to-night. There is news coming in by wireless."

The Duke told himself: "Got a radio, receiving and sending, I'll be bound, the fox." Aloud he said: "I accept. When do I get the money?"

"Now. I will make it four thousand. Pay off your men."

ONCE more he clapped his hands, gave an order to the secretary. The two attendants had not moved. Only the glittering eyes in their masklike faces showed they were alive. But the Duke knew they were alert. He did not question but that Wing had a score more servitors close by. The secretary returned with a tray in which were racked golden coins, and a bag. He counted out two hundred double-eagles in American money.

Wing had taken a seal from a drawer, ran hot wax to a square of paper, made an impression.

"You want a receipt?" asked the Duke, his fingers itching for the coin. It made him a free man, gave him the stake he needed.

"A receipt is but a scrap of paper. Honor is a better guarantee. My word is my bond. What I say, I perform to the letter. If a man lacks honor, if his word is like a container that will not hold water, his safety binds him. Here

is my seal and the money. There is no more to say, except: waste no time."

"You can jolly well trust me not to do that," said the Duke, the heavy bag in his hand, some fifteen pounds' weight of gold. He doubted whether his pocket seams would hold it.

"I can trust you—for that," said Wing. The pause was so meaningful that the Duke flushed a little. The gong sounded. The audience was over. The two attendants moved, one to each side of the door. The secretary came in once more as they left, laying a paper in front of Wing. The Duke caught sight of a Chinese with radio headphones glued to his ears.

They were escorted to the porch, the Duke carrying the canvas sack of gold.

"'E don't want much," said Ginger sarcastically, as they turned toward town. "I don't like shippin' 'is blarsted crew. Pirates, I'll bet my whack of the swag. They'll try an' cut our bloomin' throats on the way 'ome."

"They won't cut mine," said the Duke.

"Or pizen the grub?"

"They'll need a navigator. Don't be a blithering idiot, Ginger. What Wing says, he'll do. You haven't acquired age or wisdom or the value of holding your tongue. He's got men listening to us now. Pipe down."

They saw no one, but the shadows were dark beyond the trees. It was not hard to imagine dark-clothed Chinese slipping along back of the palms. Few in Tahiti did not talk beach-pidgin, and understand both French and English, however little they might betray it. Ginger subsided, mumbling, voicing no more protests till they got into Papeete.

"Gimme one of those twenties," he said. "I want a man's drink."

"You'll show up sober to-morrow, or you'll stay out of the deal," said the Duke.

"I will, will I? Are you tryin' to cold-deck me?"

The Duke's voice was suddenly cold.

"No. But I'm engineering this deal. Do you think Wing would have given you the cash? Do you think a girl like that would sail with you as skipper? You'll keep in the background till we get to sea."

Ginger muttered in his beard. The Duke took no notice.

THEY passed the market; passed the tied-up Hihimanu. She was moored to the wharf, graceful of line and slender of tapering spar. The moonlight sparkled on the glass of her skylight, on the brass of her binnacle and cleats. There was a dim light showing through the skylight. There were official watchmen aboard. Ginger, whose mind swung easily, chuckled.

"We'll give those French blighters the chuck in the mornin'," he said. "Bright an' early. Wot's the girl like?"

"It doesn't make any difference what she's like, as long as her father values her. He won't want damaged goods, Ginger, don't forget that."

"We're sailin' with 'er, ain't we? Is she a looker?"

"She's quite presentable."

"You're a cold-blooded bloke," said Ginger, and he thought he was right. He had seen the Duke's methods with women. He believed he knew his partner; but he was mistaken.

"I'm going to the club," said the Duke. "I'm going to stow this in the safe, all but fifty dollars. This young chap may be there and I'll get acquainted, after they know I've got a few thousand in the safe."

"You're a downy bird yourself," said Ginger, his good humor restored. "Do I get that twenty?"

"Of course."

"I ain't stayin' at the club. They're a bloody lot of slobs. I'm goin' back to Turk's to chuck gold on 'is bar. An' see 'ow he likes it."

"No rows."

"You tamed 'im. You're a good scrapper, Duke, if you do make the bloomin' error of fightin' clean." Ginger's voice was slightly speculative, as if weighing the Duke against himself.

"I can fight the other way, in an emergency," the Duke said quietly. Some day, he knew, Harris and he would come to it. To him the customs of Harris were a constant annoyance, his manners were nil. Some day there would be a split. Three hundred thousand dollars. A third was one hundred thousand. A tidy sum. But two hundred thousand was twice as good. He had a hunch—a sound one—that Harris might be thinking the same thing.

"I'll not come up," Ginger said at the club entrance. "Gimme the twenty. I'll be on 'and in the mornin'."

He went off with the coin, swaying in his sailor's walk, his hands at the ends of his long arms reaching almost to his knees, half open, as if they were ready to clutch a rope. A strong man and a good sailor. But not a navigator. That was where brains counted, the Duke told himself.

He entered the club room, nodded to a few, went to the cashier's desk and plumped down the chinking bag.

"Give me a receipt for thirty-nine hundred and fifty dollars," he said. "I'll bank it in the morning."

It made an effect. He got responses to his worded greetings. A member introduced him to a guest.

"Here's the man you want to meet, Mr. Barrett. Captain Allerton. Is the Hihimanu open to a charter, captain?"

"Open as a wide door," said the Duke genially. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Barrett." There was a sincerity in his tone. "You're looking for a ship?"

The luck had surely changed. The grip he gave the young American was cordial.

"NOT exactly for myself," said Fred Barrett. He had had a drink or two; and it was easy to see he was glad to meet a skipper who was so evidently a gentleman. "But I am acting for a friend of mine."

"Fine. Let's not talk shop. See the ship first. Nothing faster in these waters; she was a yacht once, built on Gloucester fisherman lines. A beauty. Come down at ten to-morrow morning. She's at the wharf. Let's have a Paumotu ricky. Ever tried it, Barrett? Cold young coconut juice, dash of grenadine, slug of gin, touch of bitters."

"It's new to me," said Barrett. "I don't mind trying it, to-night. I'm celebrating a little."

"Birthday?"

Barrett shook his head. He was not going to mention the fact that dawn, on the deck of the steamer, with the faint peaks of Tahiti blue stains against the southern sky, had seen him affianced to Thelma Farleigh, made part of her life from now on.

They had met on the steamer and youth had called to youth. Now he was going with her to the island where her father, ever since the death of his wife eleven years ago, had made a recluse of himself while his child, nine when his wife died, was being educated. Life looked very roseate to

Fred Barrett. He was no tippler; but this was the greatest occasion of his life.

He had money enough of his own. Whether Thelma was rich did not matter. They had made plans. They were not going to be drones but, after they had had their honeymoon, would do something purposeful, worthwhile.

"You didn't go to the opening of the lagoon for pearls, captain?" he said as the drinks were brought. The Duke looked serenely about him. He was rehabilitated. The chinking bag had restored his credit. No one would lightly asperse him now, or give the reason for the Hihimanu's being still in Papeete.

"It's shell rather than pearls they're after," said the Duke. "Matter of fact, the divers get the pearls. And it's a big lottery. They open those lagoons too often. Pearls are like gold," he said, as he sipped his ricky, testing it, then drained the glass. It was a week since he had enjoyed a decent drink. "They're where you find 'em."

CHAPTER III.

A DEAD MAN'S WARNING.

THINGS clicked like well-oiled clockwork. The Duke took a room at the hotel for the night, enjoyed a luxurious hot and cold shower, shaved and dressed carefully, put on the shoes he had whitened the night before, and critically surveyed his reflection. This as much for his own satisfaction as the result he expected to achieve in impressing the girl.

He held little doubt of that. Personally, he did not care what she thought of him, outside of her chartering the Hihimanu. She was merely the queen in the hand he held, the winning card, the card he would keep in the hole until he got the pearls. And he would get them, no matter if he wiped out Farleigh and all his outfit. His was a cold and calculating deviltry.

Barrett, he considered lightly. He was a good-looking youngster, he had not drunk too much—though the Duke had prepared not to let him do that; he was intelligent and animated, a likable sort. To the Duke he was merely negligible—a deuce in the pack. He did not entirely subscribe to Wing's statement that every card in the deck had value. He preferred to discard the small ones. Barrett would be more or less of a nuisance aboard; but it would not be for long, and he could be handled.

As the Duke sleeked back his hair he was going over figures that were flickering constantly in his mind; two rows of them, two amounts. One was a hundred thousand dollars, the other two hundred thousand. There was no means of checking up how much the pearls might be worth, but Wing had not even hinted they might be less in value than the sum named, and the Duke accepted it as something fixed, definite. If there turned out to be more in the pot, so much the better.

Ginger would quickly make a fool of himself with a tenth, a hundredth part of his share, and would probably have the rest taken from him while he was on a drunken spree. Given this prize, the Duke was through with Ginger. Ginger, sober, would look out for h i m s e l f. The Duke knew they no longer trusted each other.

He put down his brushes—he had brought up his kit from the cheap room where he had been forced to live while the luck-tide was at ebb—and flexed his muscles. He was fit as a fiddle. If

Ginger was a bear, he was a puma. If Ginger was an orang-outang, the Duke could play python.

He bore no rancor toward Wing Lee. He accorded him involuntary admiration that he was r e l u c t a n t to admit. One thought lined up in that connection. How would Wing know the size of the loot? He would have his spies aboard, but, unless things went sadly awry, they would not be present when Farleigh handed over the gems. It looked like an easy chance to get away with some, to sell them later, in the States, in Europe. Ginger would come into that scheme without demur—if Ginger was to come in anywhere.

The Duke shook his bronzed, well-featured head at himself. Somewhere in his brain an automatic alarm went off. It would be a chancy thing to cheat Wing, even if he could. There were "Chinese everywhere," as Wing had said. He shrugged his shoulders, shook that off. He could veer clear of Chinese once he got away from Tahiti.

Monocle gleaming, he strolled onto the breakfast porch. A fine morning, still cool; there were few people down yet. The steamer would leave at ten, when he would be closing the deal for the trip. The trade wind was blowing—good sailing weather. The Duke was sailor enough to prefer canvas to his auxiliary, necessary as the latter was in those seas of fickle winds and reefs and treacherous currents.

He savored the breakfast; papaya with a dash of lime juice; broiled mullet, rolls, coffee, marmalade. Finger-bowls, flowers on the spotless linen, deft service. It was a foretaste of his own life he was coming into—very soon. He tried to imagine Ginger in such surroundings; it was good the fellow preferred his own.

The Duke sat back and signed his chit. He set out small coins for the boy and caught the latter looking at him with slanting Chinese eyes that looked mild as black velvet. The Duke did not trust appearances. This slim Chinese waiter would probably report to Wing every detail of that breakfast. What of it? But the Duke felt as if something had crawled down his back.

HE forgot about it as he went down to look at the schooner—his once more, as he considered it. Ginger actually had a half share, shipping as mate; a fine sailor, but without a ticket. He had no head for mathematics.

The Duke preferred it so. Tickets didn't count for much, south of Capricorn. It gave him an edge on Ginger. He wondered whether any of the men Wing would send could navigate. You could never tell what a Chinaman might be able to do—except about engines; there they did not shine. Wing would send a man to run it, of course, for he knew all about the Hihimanu's equipment, but Ginger would look out for it. He was handy there.

No crew was in sight. Wing would wait until the schooner was cleared. He would know when that happened. There was a Chinese janitor in the French government office. "Chinese everywhere." The phrase clung, like a burr.

A good ship, the Hihimanu; but soon he would be through with ships.

He had to wait till nine o'clock before the officials appeared. The janitor was there, taking no apparent notice. At last they came, lazy, almost reluctant, the Duke fancied, to discharge his lien. He set down the double eagles in rouleaux.

"Five hundred francs for each of

these," he said. "I fancy the exchange betters that rate. But never mind." They did not thank him for the gratuity. The colonial service wanted the Duke and Ginger on many unproved counts; but they had to take his money, give him his papers.

Ginger was there when he got back to the boat. He was not drunk, but was surly from his overnight potations. He wanted to kick the guards ashore, and cursed at them. He was a disreputable-looking, frowzy object, bleary-eyed, his beard stained with tobacco juice.

"You don't advertise the ship," said the Duke. "Drunk last night?"

He did not press Ginger to stay out of sight. He meant to maneuver that.

"I was tight, all right," said Ginger, unexpectedly genial for the moment. "I made Turk's eyes bulge when I spun the twenty. I spent it there. 'E wanted to put me out, but 'e dursn't. 'E don't like singin'—not mine—so I sang. I sang all the smutty chanties I know, an' that ain't a mere dozen. They all joined in. 'E 'ad his two bullies in an' that squint-eyed 'andy man of 'is, but they didn't start nothin'. I quit when I was 'oarse."

"You didn't give anything away?"

"I told 'im we was sailin' free this mornin'. 'E could 'ave cut my throat. Did you know you give 'im a black eye? A fine shiner. That squinty of 'is was 'angin' round 'ere a little while ago tryin' to pick up somethin' an' I booted 'im. When's the girl comin'?"

"She'll be here at four bells, with her sweetheart."

"The young toff? 'Ere comes the crew—some of 'em."

They came in twos and threes, eight in all. The one who reported as cook was pure Chinese; his helper, who was to be pantryman and steward as well, was of the same race. None of them were without a trace of it. Part Tahitian and part Melanesian mixtures. Two looked like Malays. Their Mongol blood showed in their cheek bones, or their eyes. They spoke pidgin, they showed the seal of Wing, the same as the one the Duke had in his wallet, on squares of tough rice paper.

Two could steer; one was to act as *serang,* or quartermaster.

The *serang* presented the Duke with a scale of wages. It was satisfactory enough. They were a capable-looking crowd, more picturesque than comely. Every man jack of them carried a knife, the Duke knew, and all would deny it. Fighters, they were, with scars on most of them; two were pitted from smallpox; one lacked two fingers. They looked like hatchetmen, he told himself, or Canton pirates.

They wore singlets, white tunics and pants, shoes. The tunics and the shoes were discarded by all except the cook and his assistant. Over their belts were sashes. Yet they would be more fitting than the natives in their kilted *pareus* for the eyes of the girl.

The Duke had ordered no provisions as yet. Time enough when the deal was completed. At all events, the schooner was clear. Wing had no legal hold on her. He did not appear, never would appear, in the scheme. If the charter slipped up it would be only a debt. The Duke had not paid off his old men yet. If they showed up, he would; if not, it could hold over.

THE Chinese went to work, the cook and helper in the galley, the quartermaster seeing ropes coiled, decks swabbed after sand scrubbing, brass and glass cleaned. They seemed independent of Ginger's orders, though they answered to them.

But they could have done the thing themselves. The Duke felt they could run the ship. Again he felt that invisible slug crawl along his spine.

The girl and Barrett came punctually. She was in white, short-skirted, with a light blouse. The wind blew against it. The Duke noticed the rounded grace of her, and he saw Ginger leering from forward. Barrett looked at the schooner with the eyes of one who knew something about ships—probably a yachtsman of sorts. He made a few remarks that backed up the Duke's guess. Barrett had evinced nothing of the sort at the club.

The girl seemed pleased. The Duke took her below as soon as possible. There were four cabins, a lavatory. The two after rooms were to be for her and Barrett. There was a small passageway between leading to a lazaretto, extra gasoline tanks.

"You've got an engine?" asked Barrett.

"Amidships," said the Duke. "Do you know anything about them?"

"Something. Need an engineer?" He said it with a laugh, but the Duke did not smile. There was too much efficiency aboard to suit his fancy. The China boy was tidying the main cabin. Too many damned Chinese.

"How long do you want to charter her?" asked the Duke.

"I am not sure," said Miss Farleigh. "We shall not be coming back, but of course that time will count."

"How far are you going?" the Duke asked the girl. "You haven't told me where, yet."

"I'll tell you when we're at sea, captain," she answered. "I prefer not to mention it anywhere until then. But it is about seven hundred miles. Fourteen, both ways. How long should that take?"

A true Farleigh, with wisdom, though not yet with age! If he had had his own crew, the Duke had thought, rather vaguely, of dispensing with the girl if he got the position, and simply taking the pearls by force. It would be easy enough with his men, Malaitans, trained savages. But Wing had forestalled that, insured their return to Papeete. And the girl was the best card, after all. He looked at her again.

"It depends. Wind and weather. South, I suppose?" He seemed casual.

"South and west."

"It might take a month."

"And that would be?"

"A thousand dollars, all found."

It was a fair price. She did not question it.

"Where does that door lead?" asked Barrett, pointing forward.

"Trade room and engine room. Trade room's empty." The Duke went down the alley, opened the door, and closed it after a look. His face had not changed, but the slug was at his spine again. "Nothing interesting in there," he said casually. "It's being painted."

The two were talking.

"Mr. Barrett thinks we should look at the other two ships," she said, "but I'm satisfied we'll be comfortable here."

"Look them over," said the Duke. "We can sail rings round them. They're a bit smelly with fishy cargoes, bilge-water. You'll see the cockroaches. I'm not maligning them; I'd rather you'd see them for yourself."

But she was decided, her chin was firm. Barrett was not going to be more than a fifty-fifty partner with his fiancée, the Duke considered.

"You'll like to see the galley?" he suggested. He wanted to get them on deck.

"I would. I haven't the money with me, Captain Allerton. If you can meet me at the hotel in half an hour?"

"At your convenience." He chinked the gold in his pocket. It was settled.

As the girl looked in the galley, the cook smiled and bowed.

"You come along this ship?" he asked. "Velly glad. Likee cookee fo' lady. You likee cully? Makee first chop cully." The Duke excused himself.

"I'm very fond of curry," she answered. "What is your name?"

"Ah Fat. Not belly fat, though." He laughed at the jest.

BARRETT drew her outside. "I don't like the look of this outfit," he said. "The crew are all part Chinese."

"What of it?"

"They look like a lot of pirates, to me, outside of the cook and that boy. Did you see the other white man?"

"I did. This is the South Seas! Haven't you got any sense of adventure and romance, Fred?"

"I'm full of romance, honey. As for adventure, I'm looking out for you. The skipper seems all right, but I heard a thing or two at the club. Hints of his not being quite straight. That mate—"

"I suppose he's what they call a bucko. He looks the way Bully Hayes ought to have looked; and I suppose Hayes actually looked quite mild. . . . I'm not bunking with cockroaches."

Barrett was too lately fallen in love to protest.

The uncouth mate was hurrying below, a curious look on his face.

"There's a dead man in the trade room, Ginger," the Duke had told him. "You'll know who it is when you see him. Stay there and keep the door closed. I'll get them ashore. We'll get rid of it later—at sea."

He saw the pair off, shaking hands. Then he went below.

The dead man was Squinty, Turk's handy man. He lay on his back, his cock-eyes wide open, staring blankly at opposite corners of the room. There was a knife in his heart, driven to the hilt.

"I thought you said you booted him ashore?" said the Duke.

"I did. I didn't scrag 'im, Duke. That's a Chink knife. They caught 'im 'idin', I suppose. Tryin' to twig what went on, I bet. Well, 'is 'ash is settled."

The Duke caught sight of something in the stiffening fingers. It was a square of rice paper bearing the seal of Wing. He crunched the wax, tore up the paper.

"We'll never know which of 'em done it," Ginger growled.

"Or care," said the Duke. "They can canvas him and stow him away. If Turk comes looking for him, don't let him aboard. He may say he sent Squinty with a note. Remember, you ordered him off. We'll stow him and sink him outside."

"I'll take care of that," said Ginger. "That quartermaster, 'e knows."

"Tell him to attend to it. We'll go out on the ebb at sunset. I'm going uptown to get the stores and collect the charter money."

He walked jauntily along. The scheme was working out. But he could not shake off the clammy feel between his shoulder-blades.

They sailed out of the harbor on a reaching breeze as the sun sank and turned Tahiti to a fairy isle. It bathed the fantastic peaks in gold and purple, draped them with misty mauve. Through one hollow pinnacle the glory

blazed like a fiery eye. Barrett and the girl stood at the taffrail.

"Turk showed," said Ginger to the Duke, aside. "'E 'ad the cheek to ask if I'd seen 'is man. I told 'im to go to 'ell an' look for 'im. They've got Squinty forward with ballast tied to 'is tootsies."

There was a slight splash at the bows, an eddying of phosphorescent water. The fin of a shark came from nowhere, tracing a luminous trail. It disappeared. The quartermaster stood at the wheel, crooning a high-pitched tune.

The Duke turned aft.

"What was that?" asked the girl. "A fish?"

"That, or garbage," said the Duke. He had not looked at the body since he left the ship that morning. He wondered what had happened with the knife. Cleaned by now, whetted. . . . The Duke did not like cold steel.

"You take the deck," he said to Ginger, went below and poured himself a stiff drink. They had plenty of that.

The moon came up, and the lovers stayed where they were, gazing at the receding land, as it blended into the azure and silver of the night. The pantry-boy scrubbed red stains from the trade room floor.

As Ginger leaned against the rail, his eyes were seldom off the girl's graceful body. They glittered in the moonlight.

CHAPTER IV.

TRIAL OF STRENGTH.

GINGER was drinking morosely. There was little for him to do. The wind was favorable, the crew efficient. Few shifts of sail. The routine work went on automatically.

The Duke managed so that Ginger had the deck while he ate with the passengers. He knew what Ginger was thinking of, and tried to forestall it; he wanted no such complications. The girl, he acknowledged, was charming. She appealed even to him, though remotely at first. He could achieve a girl like that now, or soon, if he wanted to. He didn't want to, permanently. Marriage, to the Duke's mind, was a fool's game.

But desire for the girl crept into his blood. He curbed it, but it made him brusque with Barrett. And Ginger never took his eyes from her. The Duke was polite, it was part of his rôle he played for his own liking and ends, but Ginger was close to showing himself in his true colors, liquor-tinted.

Ginger was only a coarse brute; but the Duke knew the devil that could be unloosed inside his suave self on occasion. The Duke's devil might have certain manners and its horns might be hidden, its hide smooth, but it was a devil, nevertheless.

It was Ginger who placed the standing of both of them.

"You're going to make a bally fool of yourself over this girl, some day," the Duke had told him. "Young Barrett's onto your ogling her. So is she."

"Barrett? I could pull 'is throttle out with one 'and. You want her yourself, Duke."

They were true enough words. Up till then the Duke had not admitted it. Ginger went on, truculently:

"We can't both 'ave 'er. There's one thing we can't 'ave, Duke. If you want to figger 'er in as part of the stakes, I'll take 'er as part o' my share. She's worth a few thousand dollars of easy money to me."

"You're a filthy blackguard, Ginger,

She'd as soon have a squid hold her as you."

"That's my lookout. You want 'er. Well, we're partners. I'll either play you for 'er, with some one else dealin' the cards, best three 'ands out of five at poker; or I'll fight you for 'er."

The Duke's eyes narrowed, the devil in him looked out of them.

"If I wanted her it wouldn't be two hundred thousand dollars' worth," he said. "Don't forget that Wing said Farleigh was far from a fool. Wing knows more about him than we do. Wing said Farleigh would be likely to have found some means of protecting himself in case any one did come to the island. The girl's our winning card. Mistreat her, and Farleigh may refuse to come through. There's Barrett to consider."

"You must be gettin' squeamish or else you're in love with her," returned Ginger with a nasty laugh. "To 'ell with Farleigh an' Barrett, too. We can *show* Farleigh the girl an' cop the pearls. If it comes to a row, didn't Wing say 'is men was fighters? An' they are."

"I'm not sure whose side they'll fight on when it comes to the girl," said the Duke. He did not know how strongly Ah Fat stood with the rest of the crew, but he did know that Ah Fat was friendly to her. She had won his favor completely. And though the quartermaster seemed to rank, Ah Fat was a full-blooded Chinese. They were all Wing's men.

"Yah!" jeered Ginger. "They're here to see Wing gets 'is whack of the pearls. 'E'd like the girl 'imself, the yellow-skinned old devil. But 'e won't git 'er. We can't take 'er back to Papeete," Ginger pointed out, his bloodshot eyes sinister. "You know where I stand, Duke. We both want 'er. Well, I'll play you for 'er or fight you for 'er. We can let it stand over till we get the pearls, if you like; but she ain't leavin' the ship."

Barrett had come down the companionway. He wore rubber soles and it was his shadow warned the Duke first. Ginger had his back to the stairs. The man's arrival checked the Duke's answer. He stood there looking at the two of them for a moment, then went to his cabin without a word, leaving the door open. He came out with an automatic in a holster.

"Going to have a little target practice?" asked the Duke, carelessly enough.

"Exactly that," said Barrett.

"Blarsted fool!" said Ginger when he had gone. "Tippin' us off he's got a gun. Thought he'd bluff us. I'm goin' on deck an' join in 'is practice. He may not think so much of 'is shootin' after 'e sees mine."

THE Duke went into his own cabin. If he played the game the way he had resolved, he would find himself protector of the girl. It was a strange situation for him. He accepted it selfishly enough. He would see how it worked out about the pearls. He would size up Farleigh. Wing's warning told him to pass up all complications. Ginger was right; if they held her, they could not take her back to Papeete.

Despite Ginger's jeer there was nothing squeamish about the Duke. He held life of no value, except his own. He had no fear of god or devil. A man's life was his own, if he could preserve it, but the Duke had no compunction about taking life.

Love was entirely foreign to his nature, which was purely selfish. But, if it came to an issue with Ginger, it

would not be with cards. If they fought it would be to a finish. Two hundred thousand dollars was big prize money, girl or no girl. He could find others. Barrett? If Barrett interfered, he would be swept aside.

He went on deck finally. Barrett was firing at empty bottles tossed overboard. He was a fair shot. He sent his bullets close to the target in play before it got out of his range. Then Ginger, who had slid his own holstered Colt on his belt, aimed the long barrel and smashed the bottle as it bobbed in the wash of the wake. He was a dead shot. So was the Duke; but he gave no exhibition.

There were rifles aboard, in the Duke's cabin, locked in the rack he had removed from the one he had given to the girl. They had been used more than once in brushes with unfriendly natives and with resisting white men. The Hihimanu had been in perilous places. There had been raids, forceful recruiting of islanders—for blackbirding was not yet dead, despite all the governments.

If he had his own crew he might have armed them, taken Farleigh's pearls with whatever bloodshed was necessary. Dead men told no tales, if properly disposed of. But he would hesitate before arming Wing's men.

For two days Ginger behaved himself. He kept out of the girl's way, but made up for it by drinking.

They were close to their destination now, and the girl and Barrett were on deck. A pack of giant barracuda were herding flying-fish, hurling their flashing bodies clear of the water with snapping, hungry jaws after the blue and silver flyers, that planed, on their transparent pectorals, in frantic escape. Here were the muskellunge of the ocean, sea pikes.

Barrett had plainly showed his suspicions ever since his entrance to the cabin. The Duke wondered how much he had heard. Not a lot, he fancied, or Barrett would have made some move. Still, his automatic showed under his white coat, a flat bulge in his hip pocket. That did not bother the Duke. It was a fool place to carry a gun—he could beat any draw from such a place, with a spring.

Ginger did not pack his Colt. He had relapsed into his own favorite sea-clothes again, wrinkled pyjamas in which he slept, his big feet sockless in sneakers. His pyjama coat was half unbuttoned, showing his bull throat, his great chest furred with rufous hair. He went unkempt, unbathed. The Duke, on the other hand, had buckets of water thrown over himself regularly every morning by the pantry boy, early, standing naked, his body a thing of muscular beauty. At first Barrett had joined him.

Barrett, too, was well-built, muscularly developed. Like the Duke, he was broad of shoulders, slim of waist and lean of flank. But the Duke was the bigger man. Since the cabin episode, Barrett would remain below until the girl appeared after Ah Fat sent the pantry boy to tap on her door. She used the little bathroom and Ah Fat saw to it that she always had plenty of hot and cold water and towels.

THE two passengers now were going to try for the barracuda. The girl's sympathies were with the flying fish. The schooner was making five knots in a light breeze. Barrett had brought tackle aboard and rigged up a trolling line with a copper and silver spoon. The big fish would have nothing to do with it. It was too insignificant.

The quartermaster gave advice. Another man had the wheel. The Duke was on deck, Ginger below, dozing, half drunk.

"You catchee white lag, led lag, missy," he said. "Tie on hook."

"I'll get some," she said and slipped below. She was wearing short sleeves, a low neck. Her skin, smooth as satin, had begun to acquire a light golden tan. The Duke noticed the supple beauty of her, but he did not reveal the fact. He had schooled himself, though he had come to no determination until they reached the island. Ginger was right; the Duke wanted her. He would not yet weigh how much.

The spoon skittered on the surface as Barrett reeled in. He had a short rod of hickory and a multiplying reel that he had used off Catalina for tuna and albicore. A big barracuda broke water, just missing a soaring flyer. Splashing back, he snapped savagely at the shining lure. He hooked himself, one triangle of barbs firmly in the jaw, the other hanging from it as he leaped, shaking his head, gills open.

The Duke watched Barrett play the fish skillfully. It took all the young man's attention.

The girl had not come back; and Ginger was down there. The Duke had a sudden hunch, remembering her bare arms, her throat and the exposed lift of her breast.

Ginger had her in his embrace. One foul hand was over her mouth, her blouse was torn. She was fighting, fiercely and futilely. She was helpless as a woman captured by a gorilla, in the tales told by bushmen.

"You blackguard!" cried Duke as he sprang from the foot of the companionway. He knew this: if he did not take the girl, Ginger should not. And, drunk and brutish, the mate had broken his word to Duke, had lost control. It was the first time the Duke had ever handled his partner. He felt a fierce satisfaction in matching strength at last.

He slugged the mate back of the ear and on it, and he knew then Ginger's quality of resistance. The blow would have knocked out most men, nine out of ten of the best. It half stunned the mate, enough to let the Duke catch him by both shoulders and tear him loose. Then he saw blood on Ginger's pyjamas, a bent knife on the floor. The table was kept set in calm weather, and the girl had defended herself. The bent metal meant she had not got home—it was not easy to get between a man's ribs.

She stood there swaying in revulsion from the attack, the sight of the blood, the defiling touch of the mate. Then she reeled and the Duke caught her. Ginger, still stupid from the smash, was fumbling at his swelling ear. Then he let out a roar.

Thus it was Barrett found his sweetheart in the Duke's arms, saw her torn clothes. His hand went to his gun. The Duke set the girl down on the transom cushions and made for him, but he knew he was going to be too late.

But Ginger, coming to—clumsy as a bear and as active, for all of that—caught Barrett's arm, twisted it up between his shoulder blades, and plucked away the weapon. Ginger had wit enough to size up the situation and chuckle at it. The youngster thought the Duke the aggressor. It was a good joke.

"Never shoot the navigator," he said, with a hiccough, tossing Barrett's weapon through the open skylight, far beyond the rail. They heard the faint splash.

"You curs!" said Barrett. "Both of you! I'll—"

"You'll what?" asked the Duke serenely. "You've barged in and made an ass of yourself. Now what?"

Barrett was beside himself with rage and humiliation. He was the girl's protector. He had let her in for this. He should not have let her come aboard with this sleek skipper and brutal mate.

"If you'd fight fair," he said, "I'd show you."

GINGER laughed. The girl sat up, rearranging her attire.

"It was not the captain," she said. "Fred—"

"They're both in it," he answered. "I heard them talking. I wasn't sure, from the little I heard; now I know... I heard things ashore. They're a pair of scoundrels."

"You're not scoring for your own side, my lad," said the Duke. "If you've heard something, I'll tell you the rest. It's a business deal. Your father, Miss Farleigh, has got a lot of pearls. We are going to trade with him for them. He gives us the pearls and we deliver you... It had to come out within twenty-four hours. Now you know."

"Oh!" She sank back, staring at them.

"If you want to fight, young fellow," said the Duke, "I'll take you on. If you win, you both go ashore without further molestation, after we get the pearls. It was Ginger, with liquor in him, who's to blame for your present grudge; but I wouldn't advise you to fight Ginger. He's an abysmal sort of brute. And I'm in command. But I warn you, I'll trim your comb."

Barrett looked about him desperately. He felt he was cutting a sorry figure. He ached to tackle the unruffled, sarcastic Duke. Barrett had been an athlete, still was. He knew how to fight, had science.

"I don't trust you," he said curtly.

"Then don't fight," said the Duke. "I'll play fair, trust me or not. Miss Farleigh, go into your cabin. Don't watch your hero defeated. Ginger, you're a disgusting object. Better fix up your ribs."

Ginger grinned. The situation still appealed to his warped sense of humor. He bared his torso to show a ragged flesh wound. He felt his rapidly swelling ear carefully.

"I owe you one for that, Duke," he said. "And her, too. I'm out of this, for now. Maybe you command the ship, but you ain't runnin' me."

"Get into your own cabin and stay there, you young ass," said the Duke to Barrett. "And stay there. The same with you, young lady. You'll be safer... You broke your own rules, Ginger. As you say, you're out of it."

The girl stood up, uncertain. Barrett lost his head, and lunged at the Duke. He could see nothing else to do, saw nothing clearly save that he had failed her, and had cut a sorry figure, unused to life in the raw where all rules and decencies were off.

The Duke swerved, the blow slid off his shoulder. He countered with a jolt that Barrett parried; then Barrett ducked a short left, jarring the Duke with a drive over the heart. He tried to follow up, found himself tied in a clinch.

"This," said the Duke, "may be interesting... You will have it, will you?"

Ginger stood grinning. He had nothing to lose. His low cunning helped him see the jest. His head was not clear from his liquor and the blow the Duke had given him. He meant to get

even for that. His ear was smashed, the cartilage broken. It would be a constant reminder. But the payment could wait.

If the Duke beat up Barrett he would earn the hatred of the girl. Ginger had it already, and it did not bother him; but this would even matters. The Duke had rescued her. Now he was losing that advantage. And if Barrett battered up the Duke, that would make the joke so much the better.

IT was a good fight, while it lasted. The girl and Ginger looked on, Thelma Farleigh with pride and apprehension. Her Fred was fighting for her, against odds.

If he lost— Well, to-morrow, if the wind held, she would see her father. She loved Barrett, loved him for his rash attempt to protect her. But, for her father, she held both love and faith in his power to rescue her. She did not remember him well. A strange and silent man, but a purposeful one.

Now she watched the fight with hope for Barrett, and a curious belief in the Duke's pledge. The man had once been a gentleman. Besides, there was bad blood between him and the mate. Her woman's intuition apprised her of that.

The Duke was a rascal, no doubt of that; Harris an unthinkable beast. But her instinct told her that, between them, she might escape. She ached for Barrett. He was her knight. He must know no humiliation in defeat. And he might win. He was forcing the fight. The Duke was covering up.

There were other knives on the table. She had chosen badly, before. At the Duke's place, toward which she edged, there was a carver. Its steel would not bend. She would strike more shrewdly next time. She had friends aboard —Ah Fat, for instance. She had read sincerity and hidden meaning in the statement he had made, more than once:

"I look out along of you, missy. You tlust Ah Fat."

The Duke was taken back by the skilled fury of Barrett's attack. But he did not begrudge it. He was measuring his man, pleased at the fellow's unexpected cleverness. The Duke had the reach. He had the best of it, or would have. There was only one thing fair in him: he liked a clean fight. He would abide by its conditions.

And Ginger was not going to get the girl.

He used his advantages. An inch or so of reach, extra weight, coolness balanced against the younger man's chagrin. The Duke took punishment, but he gave more. Barrett fought gallantly, furiously, the Duke with cold precision. Twice his long left grazed the other's chin. They were both sound of wind, but the battle took toll.

Barrett's fury was his undoing. He played for the Duke's body, hammered at his kidneys, hoping to find a weak spot, but discovering none. Blood trickled from the Duke's lips, but Barrett's left eye was closing. He bored in, resorted to a shift. The Duke met it with his own. Barrett's right lead fell short. The Duke's right fist crashed home.

Half conscious, Barrett felt himself picked up, flung on his berth. The door of his cabin closed. The key turned in the lock, outside. Bitter defeat, not ignoble, but deeply tragic, gnawed at him as he lapsed into insensibility.

"You'll be safe in your cabin, Miss Farleigh," the Duke repeated. "I advise you to go there."

She did not know what to make of him but, of the two, she had to trust him. He left the key inside.

Ginger had got a bottle of gin from his cabin. He put it to his lips.

"You're a good scrapper, your style," he said with a hiccough. "You ain't licked me, though. Not by a long shot."

The Duke looked at him; said nothing. Ginger laughed, and staggered into his cabin.

AN hour later the Duke came down to supper. He found the pantry boy with a tray, tapping on the girl's door.

"Who told you to do that?" he asked.

"Ah Fat."

Ginger's door opened. The mate appeared, lurched to the table. "Bring me another bottle," he ordered the boy.

"You'd better sober up, Ginger," said the Duke. "We'll make landfall to-morrow."

The girl's door remained closed. The boy turned away with the tray.

"You go to 'ell," Ginger told the Duke. "I'm a better man than you are, drunk or sober."

"Have it your own way," said the Duke indifferently. The pantry boy came back with a bottle of squareface. Back of him was Ah Fat, with the tray.

"I think missy betteh eat," the cook said.

"I'm giving orders on this ship," said the Duke, though he had no mind to starve the girl, or Barrett either, for that matter. Ah Fat put down the tray. His sloelike eyes showed no fear.

"I savvy," he said. "But Wing Lee, he tell me, some time I think goo' time, I give you this. Mebbe this goo' time."

He produced a square of paper. On it was the seal of Wing Lee. He gave it to the Duke. He fished out a second.

"Mebbe you likee," he said to Ginger. The mate stared at the token with bleary eyes, uncomprehending. But the Duke held a swift vision of Wing Lee behind his teak table, the unwavering eyes of wisdom back of the glasses, his thin lips turned down, his nose, strongly hooked for a Chinaman, curving down above it. Slowly the Duke crumpled the paper.

"It's all right, this time, Ah Fat," he said; and felt the slug track crawling along his spine.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

A Cannon Ball's Return Trip

AN interesting relic owned by a Canadian family is a cannon ball that was fired by both sides during the war of 1812. This exchange took place between Ogdensburg, New York, and Prescott, Ontario, where the hostile forces faced each other from opposite sides of the St. Lawrence River. The ball was first fired by the Americans from Ogdensburg and destroyed the breakfast table in the British officers' mess at Prescott. One of the officers recovered the ball and fired it back to the Americans through a British cannon, striking the courthouse in Ogdensburg. The Americans recognized it as one of their own cannon balls.

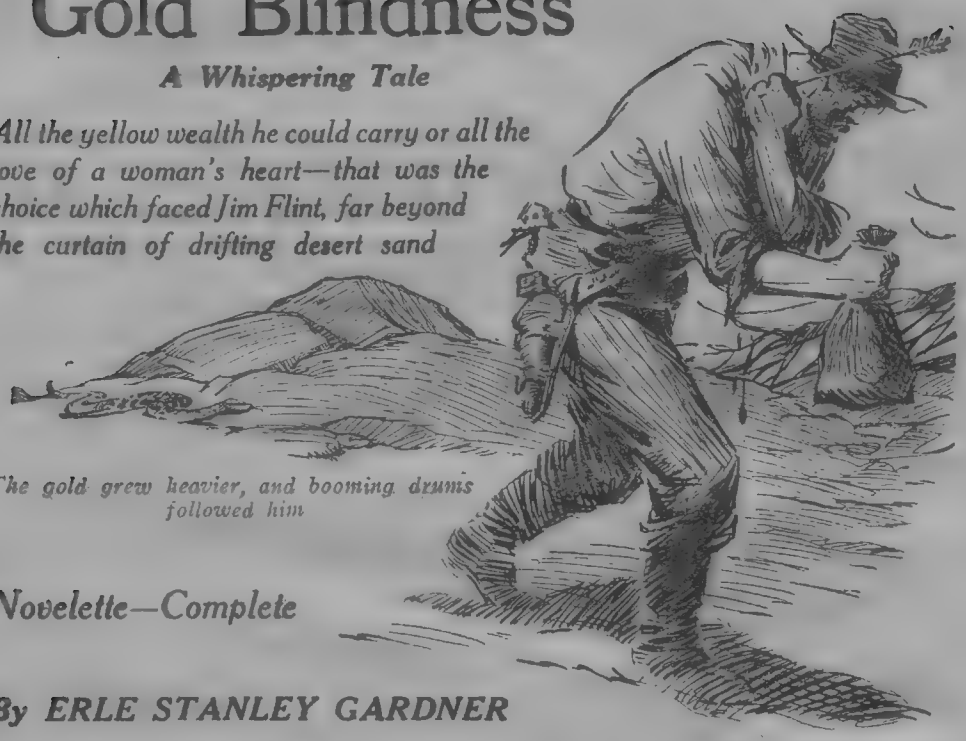
After the war, when the two towns were on friendly terms again, this unusual souvenir was given to one of the family of the Canadian officer who had fired it back across the river; and it still remains in the possession of his descendants.

John H. Spicer.

Gold Blindness

A Whispering Tale

All the yellow wealth he could carry or all the love of a woman's heart—that was the choice which faced Jim Flint, far beyond the curtain of drifting desert sand



The gold grew heavier, and booming drums followed him

Novelette—Complete

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

CHAPTER I.

DESERT WHISPERS.

OHO! So you're interested in the little yellow pellet, eh? Look again! Virgin gold! It's a nugget, worn smooth by rubbing around the bottom of a stream. And here's another. Look! But don't look too long.

You'll become gold blind if you're not careful. Oh, yes, you can. Men get snow blind from the glitter of snow, and they get gold blind from the glitter of gold.

A story connected with it? Rather.

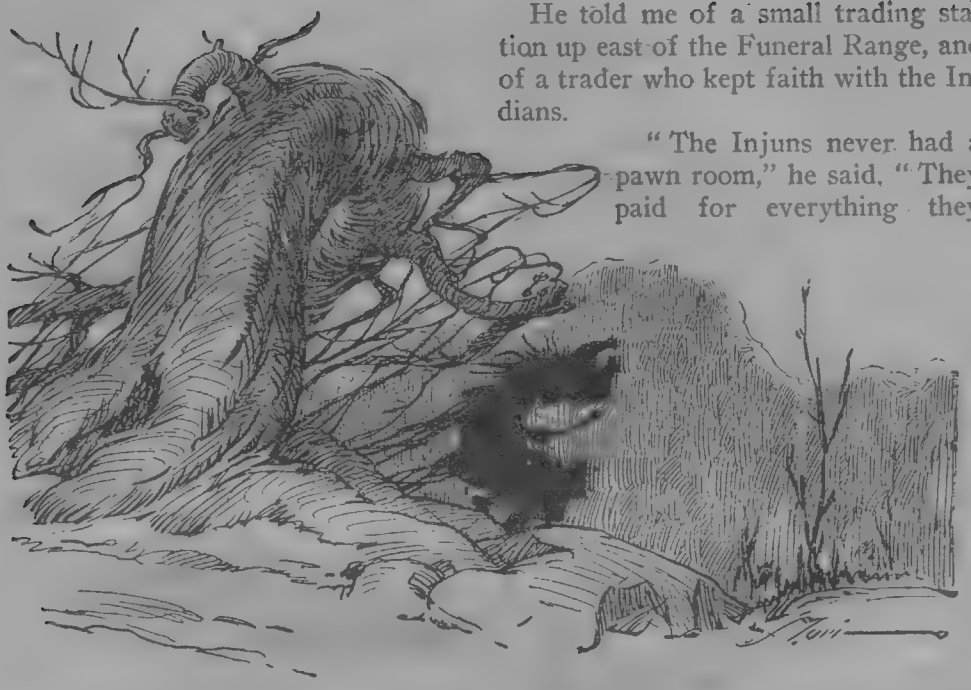
In Ensenada I first heard of the gold. Like all of those things, it came in whispers. The desert's full of whispers. The sand whispers to the cacti as the wind blows it against the green stalks, and sometimes you'll even hear the sand whispering to the sand.

Sure, it's the wind—if you want to figure it that way. I'm not a fool. The sand blows along the desert and gives off a peculiar sound. It's just the wind, and the sand. But sometimes when you're asleep in the desert you can hear the sand whispers, and you'll wake up. Then there's a minute, just before you get fully awake, that you can hear the sand talking.

But that's not the whisper I heard about the gold. That came from an old engineer, a mining man, a prospector, an adventurer.

He was dying at the time. We all thought it was t.b. He kept wasting away, getting thinner and thinner, and he coughed most of the time.

You know how the beach stretches along the ocean there at Ensenada. There's the city, then there's the sand, and then there's the bay of Todos



Santos. By day it's a deep blue, warm as milk. By night it reflects the stars. There's not much surf, just a lazy waving of the water that splashes in little sheets of hissing foam.

ONE night this mining man told me his story. He was pretty far gone, and he had to whisper it.

We sat out on the shore. The stars glittered and reflected from the water. There was a little wind, just enough to make the sand whisper. Tiny waves hissed up on the shore, as though they were whispering back to the sand. And the sand blew along on the warm breeze and whispered to the water, and the engineer whispered to me. Behind us, the lights of the town showed as pin points of brilliance against a jet background.

Of course, I didn't believe that fellow at first. It was like all those other whispered tales you hear in the desert. The country's full of them.

He told me of a small trading station up east of the Funeral Range, and of a trader who kept faith with the Indians.

"The Injuns never had a pawn room," he said. "They paid for everything they bought, provided they could not trade for it. An' they always paid in a little back room, sort of private. . . ."

I waited for the engineer to go on, but he had a fit of coughing that almost laid him out. I wasn't much interested —not then.

Finally he managed to whisper again.

"I went one night an' peeked in through a little knot hole," he said, "an' saw the trader weighin' out gold dust. He spoke Injun to the customer an' asked if he didn't have anything to trade. The Injun gave him a hard-luck story about how he'd lost all his stuff so the medicine man had let him take the gold. The trader nodded an' finished weighin' out the gold."

That sounded goofy enough, but I nodded real seriously. The man was dying, and there was no call for me to start an argument over something that was none of my business.

He had another spell of coughing.

Then he went back to whispering, telling me about how he explored the country where the Indians lived, and finally found a cavern that was gold from grass roots to bed rock, and about how an Indian medicine man shot a little arrow into his shoulder and breathed a curse.

And he told about how he got a stake of gold and started out of the country, and about how he got sick and the gold got heavy, and about booming drums that followed him and sounded inside his ears, and about a snake that followed him wherever he went, and about how he woke up one morning and found the gold gone, and about being sick ever since and being afraid to go back.

I nodded as grave as a judge.

Then this engineer rolled back his shirt and showed me where the arrow struck.

He was all wasted away to skin and bones, but the scar was there, all right. And the funny thing was that he had started to get sick right around that scar. You could see where the flesh had turned a reddish purple and the muscles had shriveled.

That made me think.

Two days later the engineer died.

They buried him out in that big graveyard across the wash. You know the place. It looks bigger than the town. Maybe it is, Ensenada is an old town; lots of people have died there. And the Mexicans keep up graves. They respect the dead that way.

Somehow or other, I couldn't get him off my mind. Perhaps it was because I spent so much time sitting on the shore near the bay, and the waves whispered as they hissed up the beach, and the sand whispered back to the waves, reminding me of the dead engineer and the story he'd whispered.

Finally I knew I had to go after that whisper, so I packed up my things and started out in my little flivver.

CHAPTER II.

A TIGHT-MOUTHED TRADER.

MAYBE you know Death Valley. It's a desolate stretch. But the engineer had said east of Death Valley. So I went up the Funeral Mountains. I traveled by night so it 'd be cooler, both on me and the car.

Rhyolite's right over the hump on the Funeral Mountains. You know, the Ghost City of Nevada. It was moonlight when I went through, a full moon. At the time I didn't appreciate the real significance of the full moon. That came afterward.

But the city stood there, desolate, silent, deserted. The white buildings, the banks, the depot, the big schoolhouse, all standing white in the moonlight, looking as though they were swathed in winding sheets.

I went on east and then turned to the south. I didn't know just where I was going, but I knew the general direction. For two weeks I scouted around the country, through the Pahrump Valley, through the Amargosa sinks.

Daytimes I'd laugh at myself for being a credulous fool. But nighttimes when the wind would blow and the sand would begin to whisper as it drifted along, I'd get to thinking I could hear the whispers of the dead engineer. And when I'd hear those whispers I'd begin to feel it was all right again.

Finally I came to a place where there was a belt of artesian water, and some mountains, and a bit of greenery, and there was a board shack that showed it was a small trading station.

I went in, just as I'd been doing at all the trading posts, and right away something seemed to tell me I was on the right track.

The man that came out to see what I wanted was a thin, dour fellow with little puckered lips and eyes that were not much bigger than peas.

I told him I wanted to look at some Indian blankets, so he showed me his stock.

Then I got to talking about business and told him I'd like to see the pawn room.

You know those pawn rooms. The Indians go broke and take their silver finery, maybe a turquoise belt or necklace, their spurs, their guns, anything they happen to have, and pledge it for grub.

Those pledges are always redeemed. The trader keeps a separate little room for 'em. Maybe it 'll be months, maybe it 'll be a year, but the Indian always comes back and pays up, gets his finery, and goes away. Maybe he'll have to hock it again within a week.

The trader shook his head.

"I've got no pawn room," he said.

Whereupon I knew I was at the right place.

"YOU wanted Indian blankets," the trader said, looking as though somebody 'd slipped a lemon in under his tongue.

I grinned and stuck out my hand.

"Flint's my name," I told him, "Jim Flint, and I'm just roaming around, looking the country over. I was wondering what sort of blankets these redskins made. They seemed to be a pretty shiftless bunch around here."

He took my hand, but his clasp did not have any warmth in it. He just stuck his paw into mine and then let it drop as soon as I opened my fingers.

"Goin' to be here long?"

"Maybe a week or two."

He thought for a minute. "Well, Mr. Flint," he said, "the Indians ain't shiftless."

I yawned as though I wasn't much interested.

"If you want any grub I can sell it to you," he said, after a bit.

"Later on, not right now."

The trader nodded and went back into the tiny office where he'd been when I came in.

That left me nothing to do except go out. I'd liked to have talked awhile, but he wouldn't talk.

I strolled over to the edge of the ditch where the artesian water went down into the little alfalfa patch, and there I made camp.

The Indians came past and looked me over. I bought a little grub from the trader, but that was all that happened in a week.

Then I sneaked up one night and looked the place over, the trading post. I wanted to see that mysterious back room where the cash transactions took place.

I'd found out about the trader. He was McLaren, a hard-bitten old Scot who could keep his mouth shut in fourteen different languages. He was a naturalized citizen and was always discussing the sanctity of the Constitution. But that was all he'd talk about.

This night the moon was old, and I took advantage of the darkness before moon-up. I sneaked around the place, looking for the room. I found it, all right. It was a little back room, to one side of the office, adjoining the cubbyhole of a kitchen where McLaren lived and did his own cooking.

I could see from the partition stud-

ding and the nails that there must be a room there. Also, I could see where there had been a knot hole, but it was filled up with putty now, and a sheet of something was nailed on the inside. Tin, I guess. I poked the blade of my knife through, and it felt like tin.

It was ticklish business. I started boring a small hole right where two of the boards came together. I had to work slow, so as not to make a noise, and I rubbed dirt in it, so it wouldn't show from the outside where the boards had been scraped.

I didn't finish that hole for two nights, what with having to work slow, and the moon coming up and all. At last I got the job done. Then I started watching. Every night after dark I'd go up and put my eye to the hole and wait.

But I didn't notice anything out of the ordinary. Once or twice I saw McLaren walking through the room. But I never saw an Indian come in the place.

I FOUND out McLaren had some booze hidden there, though. Twice I saw him break out a bottle. I made up my mind I'd ask him some day about how it happened he believed in the Constitution so hard and yet kept a stock of hooch in his place.

After a couple of days, when it got slap dark of the moon, McLaren said he was going away to get some stock for his store. I offered to run the place for him while he was gone, but the old fellow shook his head and didn't even thank me.

"It's dark of the moon," said he.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"The Indians won't trade during the dark of the moon. It's some sort of a religious business with 'em."

I pretended to be awfully glad.

"Then I'll ride down on the truck with you and pick up some little stuff I need. It 'll be company for you, and if you should have a breakdown you wouldn't have to leave the truck and go for help."

He wasn't cordial, but the code of the desert's a strange thing—something that a man don't dare run against—and so he agreed.

I made up my mind I'd see what sort of money he used in paying for his stuff. Not that I was going to take any advantage. It was simply a business proposition. I thought there might be gold in that Indian country. I did not want any of McLaren's gold. I wanted to find some of my own, but I didn't want to go on any wild-goose chases.

He went to San Diego for his provisions. Why he went there I don't know. Maybe because of wholesale prices. He went to a bank first. I told him I wanted to cash a check. He nodded and introduced me to his banker.

I've never seen a banker with such fishy eyes or such a cordial handshake. That banker started shaking hands with me while McLaren started for an inner office with the cashier. He was still working my arm up and down like a man jacking up a car when McLaren came out.

And then McLaren got cordial. He acted like he didn't have a care in the world. He cracked Scotch jokes, and he indorsed the check I wrote on a Los Angeles bank, and he kidded the banker. He was like a two-year-old colt just turned into pasture.

Quickly the cashier came out of the little inside room, rubbing his hands.

"Your credit is one thousand four hundred and ninety dollars, Mr. McLaren," he said in a low voice.

McLaren made some figures.

Now, why should a banker have to wait a while to tell a man how much he had deposited? There was only one answer. The cashier must have been weighing out gold dust in that inner room.

I didn't say anything, McLaren didn't say anything. The banker didn't say anything. But McLaren gave a guarded glance at the banker, and the banker replied with a slight nod of his head.

I remembered how the banker had held me with his long handshake, keeping me from following McLaren into that inner room. And I remembered how the banker's cordiality had vanished into thin air when McLaren came out.

I got my check cashed, after which McLaren and I went out of the bank, went to a wholesale house where McLaren bought a bunch of stock. He paid for it with a check. I wanted to start back. McLaren wanted to go to Tia Juana. We went to Tia Juana.

McLAREN was not the Scotchman of the joke magazines when it came to the booze. We swapped treats for a while, and then McLaren started to spend. Not that he was throwing any money away, but he was buying all the drinks.

I switched to beer. Even then I was feeling a little uncertain about the sidewalk when we got started back, and Mac insisted on stopping in one of the *cantinas* for a last shot of oil.

Then was when he did the funny thing.

He pulled out his purse, couldn't find any small change, turned the purse upside down, and some gold nuggets fell out.

There were only three of 'em, and they wouldn't have run over five dollars, but they were virgin gold.

He scooped 'em up quick and dropped 'em back in his purse.

After a bit he started to explain.

"Pocket pieces I've had ever since I used to be a prospector, years ago. I've carried 'em in that purse for years and years."

He leered at me like an owl leering at a titmouse.

I nodded and sipped my beer.

He gulped down his whisky, looked at me again, and took a deep breath.

"Flint, you been like a brother to me. I'm going to tell you the real truth."

That sounded better. I sat my beer glass down and tried to act only half interested.

"There was a prospector came into the place and wanted me to grubstake him. He showed me some gold and said he'd stumbled on a place where it was thick. I gave him a hundred dollars' worth of grub, and he left me the nuggets. I ain't never seen the prospector since."

I pretended my ears hadn't been expecting anything else. He was getting drunk, but he was an awful liar.

"Do you s'pose we could smuggle a bottle across?" he asked me, putting his head over toward me and peering with a strained expression in his eyes, like a drunken man will.

"We could smuggle two bottles, one apiece," I told him.

We did.

In a room in a San Diego hotel I poured whisky into him. He seemed to suspect I was getting him oiled, and he had the thought of the gold on his mind, all right.

When the second bottle was half empty he leaned forward, holding the edge of the table.

"Goin' tell you real truth about thash gold," he said.

I moved over closer.

"Jush like a brother to me, Jimmy, old boy," he went on, swayed, straightened, filled his glass and drained it at a gulp. "I came on old prosh-pector . . . awful shick . . . dying. I did besht I could, but prosh-pector died. I wash a thief. I went through hish roll an' found half pound gold dusht. Thish what's left."

And then he sagged over on the table and went to sleep.

I put him on the bed, went down, checked out of the hotel, and caught a night train out. At Las Vegas, Nevada, I outfitted. It was a funny outfit, but I was going on a funny errand.

CHAPTER III.

WATCHED.

I KNEW the country pretty well, and I went into the Indian country from the back way. It was hard going. I had a burro to ride and two to pack, but I took it easy. And I did not get clean into the Indian country. I stopped just below the summit of the range that ran into the desert.

There was timber here, water, and lots of game.

I shot a buck and built a fire. I used green wood, so the fire made lots of smoke. I cut up the venison and started to jerk most of it. A ham and some backstrap I hung up in canvas. I kept the fire going most of the time, and, as I said, it made lots of smoke.

I didn't see anybody at all.

Next morning I went out with my rifle as though I was hunting. But all I did was scout around the ridges above camp.

And I found what I was looking for. The trail of a moccasined foot. I backtracked it to the place where the Indian had squatted behind a clump of brush and watched my camp.

Then I walked all up and down that ridge so my tracks wouldn't show as having just trailed the Indian, and I put up a target and did a little shooting. Then I went back to camp and let the fire go out.

I stayed there four days without seeing a soul.

But, every morning, I'd take a short hunt, and always I'd find moccasin tracks. Sometimes they'd watch me from one angle, sometimes from another. Sometimes there'd be two or three, sometimes one. But they always had me watched. Yet I never saw the faintest flicker of motion on those hillsides.

And the air's so dry up there, and it's so high, that the sun just floods light all over the country, all except in the shadows. The shadows are sharp, and contrast with the sunlight so it's hard to make the eye see into 'em. The Indians watched from the shadow. They must have followed the shadows around.

On the fifth day an Indian came up the cañon. He was carrying a gun and acted as though he was trailing something. When he looked up and saw my camp he acted surprised. Too surprised. In the first place, any Indian would have smelled the camp before he rounded the bend. In the second place, he wouldn't have acted that surprised over anything. But I pretended I didn't see anything wrong in the way he acted.

He came into camp and smoked a cigarette Indian-fashion.

That is, he squatted on the ground, and his first six puffs were ceremonial puffs. They always smoke that way. First they puff to the four directions.

Then they puff up toward the sky and down toward the ground.

AFTER awhile he looked around at camp. "Killed deer," he said.

"Four days ago."

He nodded. "You stay four days one camp."

"I stay long time one camp."

"Hunt?"

"Little bit."

That was a pretty long conversation for an Indian to have with a stranger, so he went back to smoking.

Ten minutes passed. The Indian said nothing. I got confidential.

"I may be here six months."

"One place?"

"Naw. I get tired of being in one place. I'll move camp around a little bit."

He waited for me to go on.

"You see, the doctors tell me I gotta live the simple life out in the open for a long time."

He grunted at that. After awhile, he said some more.

"You stay down trader's for awhile?"

I nodded and let my face all break out in smiles.

"Did you see me down there? I don't remember you. Sure, I've got some things down there yet. But I went in to see the doctor in San Diego, and he said I'd have to get up higher in the mountains."

The Indian grunted again. Then he lit another cigarette, and went through the same rigmarole of smoking it.

Indians always do that, but you've got to watch sharp to catch 'em at it. They turn their heads casually, as though they were looking around at something, and you don't figure they're turning so as to blow the smoke at the four points of the compass, then up toward the heavens and down into the earth. They want the spirits propitiated before they smoke. It's like saying grace over a meal.

After awhile my visitor went away without saying anything more.

I stayed in that same camp a week longer and shot another buck and jerked most of the meat. I didn't see another soul.

Then I moved down the cañon half a mile and made another camp. I stayed there five days, cut across a ridge and pitched a camp in a clump of timber. It was cold there in the mornings, and I stayed only three days. Then I worked toward the foothills.

Finally I began to see Indians. They didn't keep out of sight so much. Now and then one would walk against the skyline and stand there as though he didn't know I was looking at him.

I never paid any attention.

When I shifted quarters the next time I moved within half a mile of an Indian camp. I didn't let on I knew it was there.

For a day or two I lay low, and then I went hunting. A couple of Indians stopped me and said there wasn't any good hunting around there, but I told them I wasn't in a hurry to get my game. After that they let me alone.

I'D been there for a week when I came on *her*.

It's not very often you see an Indian before that Indian spots you. But I did that with Auno. She was engaged in a ceremonial dance on a little flat of sandstone. It was just after sun-up and the air was still pretty crisp.

I saw her shadow first. Shadows are sharp in those mountains, and the sun was low enough to make hers long. The shadow moved and I thought I'd seen a deer. Then I moved over a bit

and caught sight of the tawny skin weaving in a series of supple gyrations.

She was playing some sort of queer flute. I could hear the sounds of the music after I listened. I tried to work nearer, but she saw me.

I passed her going toward the camp. She wasn't even breathing hard, but she'd been staging a sun-up dance and must have run for three or four hundred yards as fast as a deer.

She looked at me with smoky eyes.

"You findum deer?" I asked.

"No findum," she said, then, after a moment: "and you don't need to talk that synthetic pidgin English to me. It happens that I was educated at Berkeley, and I majored in English."

I stood on one foot then the other, trying to think of the proper comeback for that one. There wasn't any.

Then she smiled. "What were *you* looking for?"

"Just walking."

"Why are you camped here?"

"For my health."

She let her eyes drift away for a flickering instant, then turned them back on me, as glittering as obsidian, as expressionless as ebony.

"If you would like to camp in the desert I know where there is gold."

I did some rapid thinking. I know Indian psychology.

"I am not interested in gold. I want health, and I must live in the mountains."

"A white man—not interested in gold!"

I shook my head doggedly.

"It is an evil. Money is only a way of storing food. But people go mad over it, and they ruin their health seeking it. I, too, had my money madness, and then I lost my health. Now I only want to live. One needs very little gold to live."

She smiled at me, and, as I was admiring the white luster of her perfect teeth, flashing against the tawny silk of her skin, she turned and slipped into the shadows.

Two days later I saw her again. After that she made it a point to keep in contact with me. I figured the tribe had delegated her to see what I was doing and keep track of me.

I was willing.

Gradually she began to talk more. And I think I convinced her that I wasn't looking for gold. Her name was Auno, and she was the only pretty girl in the tribe. It was just a handful of people anyway, not more than a dozen families.

After awhile I got acquainted with them. Among them were Hanebagat, the chief, and Bigluk, a young fellow who was sweet on Auno. And then there was Wailo, the medicine man.

I don't know how old Wailo was. Nobody did. He had some blue tattooing in his face, but the features had wrinkled so much that it showed only as a blotch. No design to it any more.

Age had withered him until he was a dehydrated shell of a man with wrinkled skin and shriveled arms and legs. But he was as straight as a young pine, and he had eyes that were like thunderclouds when the lightning first starts to play around the dark places.

He said nothing, although his eyes were on me all the time.

I'D been there three months before I learned about the moon ceremony. It was an ancient rite, handed down from the time when the tribe was powerful.

It took me quite awhile to get the straight of it. You see, they weren't Piutes, and they weren't Navahoes, and they weren't Apaches. I'd have guessed

they were an offshoot of one of the Pueblo tribes that had drifted through the Navaho country, picked up some Piute and Apache customs, and then settled somewhere around the Death Valley.

Age, disease, changed conditions and white encroachments had done the rest. They were the last remnant of a dying people, and they knew it—all except Auno, the girl.

She used to try and pep them up, tell them of the future, predict that they would come back to their own. But the others watched her with somber eyes and said nothing.

It's hard to watch anybody die. Death seems to send a shadow that hovers about the dying one for quite awhile before the soul slips its moorings. It's harder still, to watch a dying race. That shadow of death seems to be with the very infants. The children play, not like normal children, but like young corpses that are walking hand in hand with death.

But it was the moon ceremony I was thinking of.

The new moon was the time for the very young people to sit out, all by themselves, on the sacred mountain. When the moon went down it was time to go back to camp and bed.

Then, when the moon got into the first quarter, the lovers went forth into the moonlight, and returned when the moon had gone down.

The full moon was the warriors' moon. It was for the men in the prime of life.

After that the older people came in. They went forth to worship on the wane of the moon. The last quarter was reserved for the sages.

Those Indians ushered in each phase of the moon with a lot of powwow and old Wailo would beat a tom-tom and wail through some song. It differed for each phase of the moon.

Wailo's personal moon was the very last of the fourth quarter, the one that came up just before the sun. There wasn't anybody else as old as he was, so he went forth alone to worship.

By that time I was down living with the tribe, almost adopted—thanks to Auno. And I remember the first time I heard Wailo at his ceremony of moon worship.

It was a little before dawn, and it was cold; cold with the dry, chilly cold of the desert places, cold with the soul-shuddering mystery just before dawn.

The old moon was riding the heavens, looking like a bit of pitted gold, and it was cold, too. I awoke with a start to hear something going *boom-boom-boom.*

I LAY in my blankets and shivered, first with the cold, then with the awful note of that tom-tom and the song that was going with it.

It was a wailing chant, coming in from the distance, borne on the thin, cold air without an echo. It was the voice of an old man trying to sing—the song of the old moon, the song of coming death, the song of a dying race.

I tried to get back to sleep, but I couldn't.

With the red streaks of dawn in the sky Wailo came stealing back to camp. He was all decked out in paint and he moved as silently as a gray ghost.

Then the tribe got up. Little fires began to burn. There was the sound of moccasined feet on the hard ground. And it was time for me to get up.

All this time I hadn't seen anything of the gold, or anything that looked like gold. But I did know that the tribe wasn't dependent upon trading, in the ordinary sense of the word.

The women wove blankets. There were some sheep, and there was a little cornfield. But the work was all done after the manner of those who are sure of their living, and work only to get what they need.

Besides, there were the coin buttons. That's the fashion of Indians in that country. They take dimes, quarters, sometimes even half dollars, solder a bar on the back and use the coins for buttons and for ornaments. When times get hard they clip the bar off and use their "buttons" for money.

The clothes of this tribe had silver buttons, and they never came off. Whenever any one needed anything at McLaren's trading post, they had a way of getting it. Old Wailo seemed to be the treasurer of the tribe.

So I figured they had a placer deposit somewhere around, and that Wailo had persuaded 'em that it was magic, and only the medicine man could take out the gold.

After that I commenced to watch Wailo.

I figured he must have a stock of the gold in the village somewhere. Maybe he knew I was watching him, but I don't think so. Anyhow, he didn't lead me to anything. I watched him, and that's all the good it did me.

But he never seemed to leave the village. He was always around, saying very little, his puckery lips sucked into his mouth, his thundercloud eyes darting around the camp, seeing everything.

During the dark of the moon the tribe dedicated the night to those who had already died. They sat up around big fires, talking in low tones of the dead, and there was a circle where the ghosts were supposed to sit and warm their hands. There were places for the big chiefs who had passed on.

The tribe slept most of the day, after those night communions with the dead.

CHAPTER IV.

LOVERS' MOON.

I GOT an idea during those long sessions around the spectral fires. When the new moon came I went to Hanebagat, the chief, and told him that I was the same as a member of the tribe now, and that I would go out on the ceremony of the first quarter of the moon. He agreed.

The word got spread around, and Bigluk made a protest to the chief. It was easy to see how his mind worked. There weren't more than five or six of them that came under the lovers' moon, and Bigluk was afraid I'd get too thick with Auno. He'd always preëmpted her for the moon ceremonies before.

But Auno whispered to Hanebagat, and the chief stood pat.

When the moon came to the first quarter, Wailo got out the sacred drum, put on some ceremonial paint and chanted a song that was supposed to be the thrilling song of love. But he knew the race was dying, and sadness crept into his voice. The chant sounded more like a dirge, for all its swing and occasional burst of noise.

After the chant we went out onto the sacred mountain, walking hand in hand. On the mountain we separated, each going by himself.

That was the ceremony. The young men were supposed to meditate upon the hunt and upon warlike deeds. The girls were to think of the tanning of skins, the cooking of food, the rearing of a family when they should get married.

If one of the young men chanced upon one of the young women after

they had separated, he could talk with her. If they stayed together until the moon set, then it was equivalent to a marriage ceremony.

Of course, all the young men in the tribe wanted to marry Auno. But Bigluk seemed to have the best chance. He was big and surly, and he sort of kept the others away. There wasn't one of them, though, that hadn't tried to find her on the mountain after they'd separated.

Custom decreed that the women should leave first. After a few minutes the young men walked apart.

There were only three young women. One was very fat. The other was homely. The third was Auno. There were only three men beside myself. One of them was rather ugly.

After the girls had gone, the men separated and I found myself out on the moonlit mountain. Below was the camp. One of the warriors started a chant that ran for a few bars, then wailed into silence. Here and there a shadow flitted.

Auno was an adept at keeping separate. They could find her, have a little chat, and she'd glide off like a shadow. But, for the most part, they couldn't find her.

I sat in the shadow of a clump of juniper and watched Bigluk. He tried to trail her for awhile, but that was too slow. She could make tracks faster than he could find them in the moonlight. So he got in the shadow of a pine trunk and searched the mountain.

Finally he was off like a deer.

I watched him. He ran fast and well. He jumped into a brush clump, and there was a sound of struggle, the low laugh of a woman, the exclamation of a man's voice, and Bigluk came out, looking disgusted.

The fat girl was clinging to his arm, pouring words at him. Bigluk was shaking his head. He jerked his arm free and went down the mountainside, peering into brush clumps.

Far above him I heard a low laugh that sounded like the tinkle of a bell.

He turned and charged like a mad bull. But he might as well have been chasing a shadow. He became dignified then and walked about with slow steps, pacing in the moonlight, no doubt meditating upon his life. But I noticed that he had his eye peeled for every bit of motion.

When the moon went down we started for camp, coming in one at a time, in silence. Then we rolled into the blankets.

The next night it was the same, and the next.

I didn't move around much. I kept up there on the mountainside, mostly in the shadows. The fat girl found me once on the second night, but I left her. She'd have been willing to stay until the moon went down, which, as I said, would have been the same as marriage.

ON the fourth night the moon was pretty strong. It was about the last of the ceremonial phase given over to the younger people. Bigluk had charged around as usual. Once he had caught Auno, and they had talked for fifteen or twenty minutes. I couldn't hear what they said, but he was doing most of the talking, and his voice was getting that note in it that comes to people when they're desperate over something.

Auno left him. That was the custom; either could leave the other and the other must not follow.

Bigluk walked into the shadows and stayed there.

I went out into the moonlight, walk-

ing, thinking. I knew it was no use to look for Auno. She could hide from the keen eyes of the Indians, and it would be too simple for her to elude me with my civilization-dulled senses. She could hide from me so easily it would make me seem absurd. I could no more hope to find her than I could to elude the fat girl.

Tht fat girl talked a little English, and she put herself in my way, so I'd have to either talk to her or be rude.

I paused for a few minutes, talked.

"You no go 'way," she said, and her eyes were bright.

I laughed.

"You too good-looking to waste yourself on white, Missa Flint. You get nice Indian."

She parted her lips and the moon gleamed on her teeth.

"I make you good squaw... *I show you plenty gold.*"

She lowered her voice for the last few words, glanced quickly around her.

I knew the danger. If other ears overheard, the fat one had pronounced her death sentence. But she had the keen senses of an Indian, and there wasn't much chance any one would have been in hearing.

I looked at her, hesitated.

She gently tilted one shoulder blade with a seductive motion.

I got a grip on myself.

"Gold no good," I said sternly. "Gold only good to buy food. Out here plenty food. One needs not much gold."

And I walked away.

It was a struggle, and I wasn't sure why I hadn't said "yes" to the girl. I could have married her, got her to show me where the gold was, and then sneaked back some night, got what I needed for a stake, and left.

Maybe they'd have trailed me, maybe not. A man can go far in a night when he has to, and a rifle in the mountains gives the one who is fleeing a lot of advantage over those who follow.

And I was pretty good at losing a trail myself. I was wearing moccasins, and there are a lot of little tricks of losing trail in that country—ledges of rock, bowlder-strewn creek beds where cloud-bursts leave their trails, long drifts of ridge which are exposed to the winds which blow in the mornings, fallen logs—oh, there are lots of ways of making it difficult to follow tracks.

Of course, it was foolish, but I began to get inoculated with something of the philosophy of the tribe. Why work in the treadmill of civilization? Civilization taxes you almost a hundred per cent for the privilege of participating in it.

You have butchers to make your kills, machinery to carry you from place to place, do your work. And yet one really lives in caves. They're made out of concrete instead of cut into the side of a precipice, but they're caves just the same, steam-heated caves. Your liver gets sluggish, and you lose the capacity to enjoy life. Out here we were free. We weren't mere cogs in a machine.

AS I walked and looked at the moon, I inhaled great lungfuls of air and wondered if there mightn't be something in the philosophy of Wailo, after all.

I rounded a bush and Auno got to her feet with a single bound, like a startled deer. Then she paused, poised on one lithe limb, half turned.

"Don't run, Auno," I said.

She settled back on her two feet, looked at me.

It was well done, but I knew that her ears had heard my steps long before I came to her. Perhaps they had heard

the conversation between the fat girl and myself.

"I was thinking, and you startled me," she half whispered.

"Thinking of what, Auno?"

She raised her head, looking at me with half-closed eyes, then tilted her neck, after the manner of a listening deer.

"He comes. You will go with me and we will avoid him."

I listened, but could hear nothing save the faint rustle of the night wind on the moonlit slope of the mountain. But her delicate senses had apprised her of the coming of Bigluk.

"Very, very softly," she said, as she nestled her warm hand confidingly in mine and guided me along the moonlit game trails that networked the side of the slope.

We crossed the ridge and were in shadow. Then she paused, listened, and led me into the deeper darkness.

"Now we are safe."

Reluctantly, I let go her hand. Of a sudden I realized what this girl had come to mean to me.

"So you would not marry, get the gold and desert the tribe?" she cooed.

"You heard, then?"

"I heard."

I shifted my weight from one foot to the other, not knowing just what to say next.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I do not care for gold—no, I'll be honest; that is not it."

She came closer to me. I could feel the warmth of her body, glowing through the soft tanned fawnskin of her clothes.

"You are not like other white men. You are more of a man, less of a hog?"

"It is because I love you!" I told her, and swept the girl into a tender embrace.

Quick as I was, she could have avoided me had she desired. Her splendid muscles functioned as easily and swiftly as those of a springing cougar. But she slipped into the curve of my arm and, after a moment, raised her red lips to mine.

For long minutes we stood, close to each other, I feeling the warm fragrance of her breath on my cheek.

The moon slid lower in the velvet sky.

"It is not the gold?"

"It is not the gold."

And, at that moment, gold seemed sordid to me. I resented the very use of the word.

She sank to the ground, pulled me down beside her, slipped her head upon my shoulder, laughed, sat snuggled close to me, patted my cheek and hair, kissed my eyes, looked up at the star-studded sky and rippled into another laugh.

"Soon the moon sets, Jimmy."

"You will go back with me, Auno beloved?"

For a long minute she was silent, thinking.

I knew when a sudden thought came to her. I could feel her body stiffen in my embrace. The hands were at my shoulder where her head had been, pushing us apart.

"Perhaps it is because you knew I loved you, Jimmy. You still want the gold, but you would rather have the gold *and me,* than the gold and her."

I was on my feet, words poured from my lips.

I convinced her heart, but the thought remained in her mind.

"We will see," she said, and made a single writhing motion which gathered the cloak of darkness about her as a tangible thing. One moment she had been there. The next she was gone.

The moon set, and I returned alone to the camp.

CHAPTER V.

ORDEAL BY GOLD.

THAT was the last night of the lovers. Thereafter Auno avoided me. And Bigluk had muttered some comment to the elders of the tribe. I detected a feeling of hostility which had not before been apparent.

The full moon came and went.

One morning the air was calm, still, cold. I set out with my rifle, going more for the exercise than anything else, for there was plenty of meat in camp.

A bush ahead of me showed a ripple of motion. I flung up the gun, and Auno stepped out into the trail.

"Are your eyes still the eyes of a white man?" she asked, tauntingly. "Do you not know that a deer would not be on the windward side of the bush? Think you that a deer would shut off his vision on the same side that his nose was blind?"

I muttered something about having seen motion and acted automatically.

She laughed, beckoned for me to follow.

She picked her way down a game trail, came to a cañon, paused, looked about her, her eyes snapping, every muscle poised, tense.

Then she took my hand. Together we raced up a bed of smooth rock, worn down by the torrents of many cloud-bursts.

She paused where a branch cañon came into the main cleft in the hills, parted a bit of brush and disclosed a worn trail.

I followed her without a word.

The trail ended at a rock. Behind the rock was a place which yawned black and forbidding, the entrance to a cave.

She slipped into it, grasped a torch from a place in the wall, lit it, and advanced.

The smoking flames of the pitch torch gave weird shadows which danced about on the wall of the cave. A damp smell of musty ages was in the atmosphere. A bat flew past, almost knocking against my shoulder.

The girl stopped, held forward the torch.

I saw where some subterranean stream had cut a channel through the cave, leaving coarse bits of gravel, bigger rocks worn smooth. I saw where a dike of rock came across the course of that ancient stream, making a dam. And I saw something else, pebbles that were not pebbles, but glittered here and there as the light of the torch struck them.

Mostly they were black, but in places the black oxidation had been rubbed away and the gold showed through. I had seen black gold in places before.

"Behold," she said, "the treasure of the tribe. There is more here than many men could possibly carry away."

I knew she was right.

AUNO moved the torch, and I saw a row of something white, something which sent a sudden chill through my bones. They were skeletons, three of them!

There they sat, grinning into the dark depths of the cavern, grouped in a row upon a little shelf in the rock.

"And these," she went on, "are the white men whose greed betrayed them. These are the skeletons of those who would have looted our treasure, stolen from us that which is ours."

"Murder?" I asked.

"Bah!" she spat, an expletive of disgust. "Murder, is it? Didn't the white men crowd us out of our own country, banish us to the burning desert? And now that we have a little of the precious metal in our possession, they must come even here and grab that, too!"

I decided not to argue the point.

"Yes," she said, and her voice was low, almost crooning, "these men discovered our secret, tried to steal our treasure. The braves trailed them, cut off their escape and returned the bodies to the cave. They wanted the treasure so much! Let them remain with it always.

"But they were foolish, Jimmy. They took the gold and started over the mountains toward the road. But had they been wise, they would have gone out into the desert. There they would have had heat and thirst, but the shifting sands would have drifted in over their tracks.

"Wailo guards the treasure. And in the mornings when there is a very old moon and Wailo is on the mountainside, a man could enter here, wait until dawn came, and then slip out. He would get far before he would be missed."

I thought that over, the last sentence in particular.

"You are telling me how *I* could steal the gold?"

She nodded.

"Why?"

"Because either you love me, or you love the gold. I want to find out which. If it is the gold, take what you can carry and go. If you love me—well, then when there comes a new moon again, Jimmy, and we walk upon the mountainside, perhaps—"

Her voice trailed into silence.

I grasped her in my arms. The torch fell sputtering to the floor, flickered a minute and went out. There in the darkness of the cave we embraced and I whispered that gold meant nothing to me.

Of a sudden, she broke away.

"Quick!" she breathed, and grasping the still smoking torch, led me farther back into the black recesses of the mountain.

There was the sound of feet upon the gravel floor of the cave. Some one stumbled, halted. A match blazed, a torch flared, and I could see Wailo, the magician, peering about the shadows.

His wrinkled skin seemed as coarse as an elephant's foot-pad. But his eyes glittered with an undying spirit that made the flames of the torch glitter in dancing reflections.

For several minutes he stood, listening, watching. Then he stooped, gathered some of the gold and retraced his steps. The torch was extinguished, and darkness fell upon the cave.

We sat, she in my arms, and waited until an hour had passed. Then we, too, sought the sunlight.

I THOUGHT much of that cave during the next two days. But mostly the thoughts came to me at night. I wondered if I had dropped so low as to be unworthy of Auno's confidence.

That fine, clean girl meant more to me than anything in the world. Beauty, charm, perfect health; and we could live the care-free life of Nature's children out in the desert, out where the tumbled mountains stretched their glistening sides down toward the Armagosa sink, down toward the bitter waters of the poison river, toward the shimmering heat of Death Valley.

Then I thought of the gold. Try as I would, I couldn't get the yellow metal out of my mind. I thought of what it would buy.

Then I realized what the Indian girl had done. She had put my soul to the test. If I had greed, she had shown me how to take all the gold I could carry and escape. If I had spoken the truth and cared naught for gold—then the next new moon would see us walking together down from the mountain.

The nights passed. I slept less. The thought of the gold tortured my mind.

Then came the old moon, the last night of the withered moon when there was a mere streak of crescent light riding in the heavens a half hour before dawn.

And then I heard the faint *boom-boom-boom* of Wailo's drum as the old man communed with himself. I thought of the shriveled arm, the wrinkled face, thought of how he had been with the tribe when he was a young man and walked on the mountainside in the light of the new moon.

And I remembered what Auno had said, that this was the safe time to steal the treasure. I tried not to think of the cursed stuff, but my thoughts turned to the gold.

A clammy sweat clothed my body. I raised myself on one elbow. The camp was silent.

Faintly, I could hear the chant of Wailo's song of extreme age, the chant that greets the grave. The drum gave forth hollow boomings, throbbing like a pulse of the night. It seemed to lift me up...to lead me...

WAITER, bring me another bottle; and bring a bottle for my friend here, too.

Take the price from this sack. See, it contains gold. There is lots of gold, pure virgin gold. My friend and I are celebrating—celebrating my return to civilization.

THE END.

Origin of the Log

ORIGINALLY a log had nothing to do with a ship. In Wales laborers used to keep account of the day's work by cutting notches in a stick which was called a "clogg," the Welsh word for wages. This device was succeeded by "talu," meaning pay; two sticks of wood were notched, one being kept by the debtor and one by the creditor. When pay day arrived the sticks were compared and each had to show the same number of notches for the account to be satisfactorily settled. The "talu-sticks" were corrupted to "tally" and the teller's department in banks was first known as the tally office.

The "Calebren y Bevidd," or "Wood Memorial of the Bards," was a collection of wooden slabs on which poets cut their memorial verses, and which are frequently mentioned in early chronicles by the monks. The first almanacs adopted these wooden slabs, crudely carving the day of the week and month, but omitting holidays. These almanacs were called "year-logs," and in the hands of sea captains became the log of the present day.

Minna Irving.

Hall's képi was shot from its perch on the gun-muzzle

Man Size

Striving to become a two-fisted battler, Towner Hall faces a more than man size problem as his Foreign Legion company is sent against the fanatic Syrian Druse

By ROBERT CARSE

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

TOWNER HALL, a bond salesman, loses his girl and his own self-respect after being worsted in a speakeasy brawl where he tried to live up to his boasts of being a "hard guy" and one of the veterans who won the war. He knows he never had the chance to do much fighting; and he makes himself face the paunchy, flabby thing he has become.

He goes abroad, and in Marseilles, with a Swede sailor, Ole Hegerson, he joins the Foreign Legion. Months of Legion training, and his first fight against Bedouin tribesmen, toughen him. But there are still better fighters than he in the Legion; he cannot feel yet that he is man size.

Corporal Loeffler, a tough devil with a mean soul, satisfies his hatred of Hegerson by shooting the man in the dark as he tried to creep back to the Legion post after a raid. Towner Hall's mad attack on Loeffler only wins him a sentence in the cells, although Captain Quabic is inclined to doubt Loeffler's story of thinking that Hegerson was a Bedouin sniper.

This story began in the Argosy for March 1.

Free at last, Hall takes the first opportunity to attack Loeffler. It is in a barroom at Sidi bel Abbes. Both men are badly hurt by the time Loeffler wins free and calls the military police.

CHAPTER VI.

A DRUSE TRAP.

FROM his cot in the hospital Corporal Erich Loeffler preferred charges against Hall that night, elaborating his own story with the statements of four witnesses, men of his own squad who had heard certain softly whispered promises.

On his way back into the barracks, Captain Quabic heard those charges, and went over to the brig to see the prisoner and accused, a most unusual thing for a company officer of the Legion. Quabic had come from dinner at the general's house, and, inside his dress tunic, were the company's marching orders—for Tunisia, then Syria.

Quabic reserved judgment on Towner Hall's case that night; kept his judgment reserved the following day, and permitted the man to return to his squad. Judgment was still reserved when the company entrained from Sidi bel Abbes, and remained reserved forever. Quabic had learned that, in the Legion, a man who fought well in battle was also going to fight occasionally in times of peace. Then again, he was not so sure about this man, Loeffler, anyhow.

Straight through quiet Tunisia, to the sea, aboard a transport and to Beyrout, in French Syria, went the Twenty-Seventh Marching Company. Things were bad in Syria, quite bad. Fighting outfits like that which had wrenched back Taifkilesh from Ibn Waid were needed there.

Mousseifre and Rezzas were past history; but close by, over the border, the Jebel Druse and irregular bands of the Ateibas and the Wahabi were raising a large-sized sort of hell in British Palestine, and those same waves of war were thrusting back on French Syria.

French troops—metropolitans, colonials, and native irregular militia—were everywhere in the land. So were the Druse raiding parties.

Up to Damascus from Beyrout the Twenty-Seventh went on a train that was sand-bagged and armor-plated, guarded by an infantry platoon of riflemen and three machine-gun crews. Along the tracks stretched rusty barbwire, and often they could see from the barricaded car windows patrols of Spahis in their brilliant red cloaks, or the fur hats and tough, lean faces of the Tcherkesh, the brutal Cossack troopers recruited by the French.

In the distance, villages smoked; and once, close to Kiswe, they passed what was left of a strong skirmish—sprawled corpses, d i s e m b o w e l e d horses, an armored car that was now nothing but a burned, bent wreck.

The men of the Twenty-Seventh swore, and t i g h t e n e d their broad leather belts over their waist cloths. Here was action for you, all right, and no waiting around for it as you did in Morocco or the Atlas. Well, what of it? A man had a better appetite when he was fighting, anyhow.

The governor-general did not keep them long in scarred, sullen Damascus. On foot and in loose marching formation, they were ordered south, toward Seba Biar, known now as a famous Jebel Druse stronghold.

It was barren country, they found to their surprise, although a bit more fertile and pleasant than the sand and

stone of Morocco. Small villages and towns dotted the shallow valleys and hills almost everywhere, but the vineyards and fields for the most part were left untended, and there were no flocks roaming the hills.

At night, when they camped, Quabic invariably chose a hill or rise of ground, made them throw up parapets and parados of stone or dirt, blanket their cooking fires, and keep a strong force on sentry-go. When they entered the villages to requisition food, water, or fodder for the company's few pack animals, one platoon went in, Lebels slung over their shoulders, while the other deployed outside in skirmish order, machine-guns set up and auto-rifles ready.

IT brought grumbling from the men. Things like that were all right, but how about a little fighting? Some of the old-timers had been here in '25 and '26, had gone through Mousseifre, and they grimly told the more eager ones they would find their fighting, sooner or later. But, on their fourth week in Syria, and after taking over the guarding of twenty kilometers of military highway from a metropolitan infantry company, they had found none yet.

Quabic, with his usual thoroughness, had them build a strong encampment at the halfway point of their twenty kilometers. From this point, north and south, the road patrols would operate. Here had once been an old cattle byre, now a shattered wreck on the side of the small knoll, its water-hole muddied and almost dry.

They dug and cleaned that out, tore down what was left of the byre, and lugged up onto the slope huge piles of bowlders. With these, where Quabic and Marceret indicated, they built an inner wall, shoulder-high, leaving openings here and there for entry and exit. Then ten paces beyond that they threw up a lower wall, waist-high, flanking that in turn with what little barb-wire they could find.

Inside the place, they dug the *ecurie*, a pit for the pack animals, so that in case of a raid the beasts would be below the level of fire over the walls. Machine-gun emplacements were set up, the shelter tents pegged in place, firewood stacked inside the outer wall, sentry-posts allocated. Once again, the Twenty-Seventh was at home.

Towner Hall's squad was on fixed-post duty that dawn. Inside the walls, beside the cooking fires, the section commanders were sleepily getting ready their commands to go out on the first road patrols. Then, far out, a mobile sentry let out a shout for the corporal of the guard. That man brushed a hairy hand across his sleepy eyes, took a last swig at his chicoried coffee, and went forth at the trot.

Five minutes later he was back, and the whole camp was awake and under arms, awaiting him. He was accompanied by the sentry who had shouted, and between them they carried a third man who made small grunting and coughing noises. Beside one of the shielded cooking fires they put him down.

This fellow was, saw the men of the Twenty-Seventh, also a Legionnaire, but one of those strange cross-breeds, a Legion trooper. On his right heel, as sign of his odd Legion profession, was a spur, although the rest of his uniform and equipment was identical with their own.

The Legion trooper, though, was dying. Every time he breathed, blood seeped through his set lips. His tunic front was soaked with the stuff. Now

the doctor was holding him up, a packet of first-aid dressing against that ghastly hole in the chest, while Quabic pushed a cupful of brandy between the set lips and asked soft questions.

It was impossible for the files to hear what the trooper said. But the clear, brazen notes of the company bugler blowing assembly they heard and understood. By squads and platoons they fell in, all but the mobile sentries far down the road. That fine fellow, Quabic, they saw, was excited, but controlled it well. It must mean battle!

QUABIC told them, standing there, a cup of coffee in one hand, a cigarette in the other.

Far up toward Seba Biar, said Quabic almost conversationally, a metropolitan colonel of the line had started out for Damascus, commanding three companies of Senegalese riflemen, seven armored cars, a company of the Battalion of Syria, and over a hundred *partisans,* Syrian irregulars who fought with the French for gold. Quite a force, that; for with him that line colonel was bringing several million francs in taxes taken from all this district to the north, also many wounded men being relieved of active duty, and a great supply of material of war from posts discontinued by order of the governor-general.

Halfway between here and Seba Biar, the line colonel had halted his strong column and sent the company of the Battalion of Syria into a reputedly peaceful village, to get water, fodder for the horses of the *partisans,* fresh food for his staff and himself. In that village the men of the Battalion of Syria had been cleverly and thoroughly ambushed and wiped out.

That had enraged the colonel. Once more he would give this district a lesson. In fact, he would smash that village and all its inhabitants from the face of the earth. He had thrown the major part of his force into the place to do so. And from three sides, on both flanks and behind him, a Jebel Druse *rezzia*—a raiding force of several thousand men mounted on dromedaries and on spirited horses, with many on foot—had closed in on him.

The colonel was a veteran of the World War, and had written several textbooks on infantry tactics. He recalled his men, somewhat cut up, from the village, and offered the Druse Emir pitched battle.

The Emir, instead, cut off his lines of communication, surrounded him completely, and settled down to a steady sniping and night raiding. Several *partisans* on fast horses had escaped and brought the news eighty kilometers down the plain to where this dying man's troop of the Legion were encamped, also on road protection duty. The troopers themselves had been almost immediately attacked by Druse dromedary men.

But with a bit of luck and his orders, riding the fastest horse in the outfit, this trooper had got here, neck-and-neck with the Druse up until the last valley, four kilometers away there. His written orders called for the Twenty-Seventh to relieve his own outfit, consolidate with them, and go on to the relief of the colonel's column, now supposed to be slowly fighting its way toward Damascus.

"You understand all that?" asked Quabic, sipping the last of his lukewarm coffee.

The men grinned. This Quabic—what a guy!

"All right, then." Quabic held a lighter to the end of his cigarette,

flipped the empty cup at his orderly behind him. "You have heard your first and last lesson in 'military tactics.' Now you march, my red-necked darlings! You, Demol"—he indicated the first platoon sergeant—"stay here with the cooks, the orderlies, those in charge of the beasts. Keep an eye peeled; we will be back this way. . . . As for you, no overcoats, no packs, no blankets. Double ammunition, Marceret; grenades and the auto-rifles. We go fast and light!",

In column of march, three abreast, they fell in, looking up ahead over the next rise toward where that dying trooper of the Legion had come from, and where they were going—one company, to succor almost a full regiment from four or five thousand victorious Druse. Well, what the hell! It was not the first time the Legion had done it.

"Attention!" Quabic stood beside his right guide, an auto-rifle in his hand, the ammunition bag for it on his chest, as had Marceret and the sub-lieutenant. His head came back, he smiled down the column, seeming to take in every man. "*En avant!*"

CHAPTER VII.

TACTICS.

BEHIND them, while they marched as only the Legion could, the kilometer markers fell away. Before them, the bare, d e s o l a t e country seemed devoid of life. Then, in the ditch beside the road, they came upon a dead horse—the mount of the Legion trooper who had brought them the news. A hundred yards from that was a young Druse boy, his camel stick still in his hands, a brownish bullet hole between his eyes, a fixed smile on his face. So!

Then, although they could as yet see nothing, they heard the firing. Quabic threw up his left hand to hold steady the heavy ammunition bag on his chest, gave the order for the *pas gymnastique*. So they came over the rise, the next, the next—and into the battle of Makrala.

The line colonel and his column, sweeping up the remnants of that Legion troop and the other small outfits stationed as road patrols, had stubbornly fought his way on to beyond the old Legion troop encampment. The place had been s t r a t e g i c a l l y chosen, on a knoll, but it was far too small for that column of a thousand or so men.

The Druse were unchanging in their desire to repeat here what had happened at Mousseifre. On the rises and little hillocks flanking the road and that deserted camp, the camel-men and horsemen rested, while from every bush and stone, every depression in the ground, their riflemen raked that oncoming, reeling column.

At once, as Quabic swung his spread-out Twenty-Seventh over that final rise, a hundred Druse snipers, protecting the road, drove a fusillade at him. Quabic sent his men down, spreading out in skirmish order, auto-rifle men and grenadiers between riflemen, with their long, clean bayonets fixed. They folded up that hundred between withering transverse fires, and the Druse Emir, seeing that, sent a dromedary charge thundering around the side of the rise at those thin khaki lines.

Towner Hall lay beside Groulious, who handled an auto-rifle. To their right, and at the extreme wing of the flank, by some chance of the skirmish work, lay big Loeffler and his squad. The old Greek, chuckling at the pleas-

ure of being in a real battle again, had reloaded the Cauchat, and was now awaiting Quabic's whistle signal to fire. He nudged the American's shoulder with his free elbow.

"Now is your chance," he whispered, "to pick off the long-lost son of Papa Wilhelm. When I break loose with the auto', let him have it, right behind the ear. The dirty swine!"

Towner Hall looked over at him. "I'd like to. He'll bump me off when he gets the chance. I've watched myself ever since we came out from Sidi. But, that's a job I can't pull myself—There she goes!"

High, clear, came Quabic's whistle blast. Over the rocky soil, in a thunder of dust-clouding hoofs, dromedaries and drivers screaming, that charge swept at them. It was unnerving and awful; men unused to it sweated with the secret fear of being trampled on by those great round hoofs. But between them now they set up a shrieking wall of lead, grenade slivers and flaming explosive.

No man, and no beast, could stand and live against that. Perhaps a dozen of the great dun-colored dromedaries lived, to rush on, their drivers firing down from the huge wooden saddles. But that flexible rank of the Legion opened wide, then closed, turned and killed them from behind.

Quabic's whistle blast rose again: cease firing. They rested there beside their hot pieces, watching the survivors of the camel charge drag back, foot by foot, toward the main Druse force.

"LOOK!" husked Groulious. "And the unmentionable called you a looter!"

Corporal Erich Loeffler had for the moment turned his auto-rifle over to a private of his squad and was busily ransacking the burnoose, the short, embroidered jacket and waist-cloth of a dead Druse camel driver who had pitched in death from his mount some yards beyond the Legion line.

"I know." Hall nodded, his eyes brooding and dark with rage. "I'll get the dog yet—but not this way, or the way you suggested... What the hell now?"

After that savage attack on the oncoming company of the Legion, the Emir of the Druse had seemed content to await the coming of darkness before he again pressed in. His men and mounts masked by the slopes, his snipers well deployed loosely about the whole French force, he rested stoically, aware of what had happened yesterday, and the day before.

On the dusty breadth of the road, the line colonel had stopped the forward motion of his column. Blood- and powder-stained men in the uniforms of the sharpshooters and the soft khaki of the Legion, had intrenched as best they might about the ambulances, camions, and the three armored cars which formed the nucleus of the column.

A ring of camels and Druse dead attested to the basic strength of this move. But, seemingly regaining his confidence from the success of the Twenty-Seventh's defense, that colonel of the line was for the first time attempting the attack.

The ambulances, trucks and armored cars had been formed into a rough sort of hollow square, within which the wounded and sick could protect themselves. Now, the rear armored car was roaring and trembling as its motor was started up. It backed away from the rest of the machines in the square, wheeled, bumped over the ditch the

Legion cavalry had dug, and began slowly toiling up the slope, square into the face of the main Druse force....

A growl, a curse, came up from the staring men of the Twenty-Seventh. *Nom de Dieu!* That colonel was a mad one! That armored car crew was going to certain death. Look—look now! Daring the fire of the three light machine-guns in the car's moving turrets, half-naked Druse sprang into the open and rolled bowlder after bowlder to bounce down the slope toward the big machine, straining along in second gear.

Three missed, and a fourth. The fifth hit, square between the front wheels, whanging against the armored radiator. The car jarred to a stop. Its machine-guns raked the exposed Druse down one after the other. Then a regular wave of Druse horsemen flung down the slope, riding far on the sides of their deep saddles.

They closed in on that stalled car as jackals close in on a corpse. Scimitars and rifle barrels were thrust through the air and gun slits in the car's sides. Dismounted men hacked at the tires, pried at the doors. Then one yowling warrior threw in a lighted brand, gesticulated to his fellows to jump back.

FOR the only time in their service with him, the men of the Twenty-Seventh heard Quabic curse. He was on his feet and running toward that flame-wrapped car, and behind him his bugler pounded, shrilling out unevenly the Legion call to the charge. Up from their prone positions, inhaling great gusts of air, up from their rude trench about the column, came every Legionnaire who understood the stirring summons of that call.

Realizing that now was the suddenly crucial moment, the Druse Emir flung his entire force pell-mell down to meet them. From the flank came the Twenty-Seventh, in a tight, spearlike column, almost shoulder to shoulder. Into the direct face of the Druse rammed what was left of the Legion cavalry troop. Halfway down the slope, on the flank, the Twenty-Seventh and the wolfish tribesmen met.

Towner Hall never knew how many men he killed that afternoon. In his excitement and blood lust, he snapped his brittle bayonet short, then clubbed with the barrel, and with the butt, until his rifle was a twisted wreck in his aching hands. Then he kicked, clawed and gored with hands, knees and feet until he found the curving sword of a sheik protruding from a khaki-clad back; and with that whirling over his head, he went on.

The Druse loved war. They loved the thrill of fighting thigh to thigh, blow for blow. But it took six blows to kill one of these mad, silent Legionnaires. And the Druse had not those long guns, with the longer prongs of steel.

Quabic brought perhaps seventy of his company and the troopers through on the other side, flung them down, ran from man to man, ordering Lebel, grenade and auto-rifle fire.

As a vast pack of wolves might, the Druse fell back; there would still be the night, when men could not see to use the bayonet...

In the road, the column had started forward, a wordless mass of Senegalese riflemen and Syrian horsemen filing close beside the rumbling trucks and ambulances. One armored car remained behind, its motor slowly turning over, its gunners aiding as best they might the retreat of the straggling, bloody Legion down the slope. Quabic, supported by his bugler and Marceret,

staggered across the deserted ditch dug by the Legion troopers, and up to the bullet-pocked side of the armored car.

There stood half a dozen men, in the red-lined capes and gold-ringed *képis* of high officers of the line. Quabic's face was a colorless, horrible mask; from his teeth his lips were wolfishly drawn back. In his right hand was his heavy service automatic. His cap was gone; one sleeve of his tunic was torn away, and blood from the flesh wound in his side rivuleted darkly down over his trousers and boot-top. Quabic's voice came thickly, unevenly:

"Who is in command here? Where is this colonel who sends men out—"

"Sssh! No!" Marceret put a quieting hand over the captain's mouth. "He is a bit off his head, *messieurs*," said Marceret to the staring group.

"Yes?" Quabic had broken clear again. "I am just crazy enough to shoot the man who ordered that car up the hill—the man who has handled fine men like this!"

Then one of the group, a small man with the markings of a staff major, a pointed mustache and a monocle, bowed low from the hips:

"I understand the captain of the Legion's sentiments. But the captain is just a moment or so too late."

With a gesture of his white-gloved hand, he sent back the men beside him. In the rear of the armored car, body and face twisted toward the last final flame of the sun, lay a man in the cape and field uniform of an infantry colonel. Gripped in the gloved right hand was a service automatic. Square between the eyes was a small and brownish hole.

"It will be remembered, gentlemen," said the staff major, screwing his monocle tighter, "that the colonel died heroically, defending the arms of France!"

..."But yes," husked Quabic. "But yes!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FANATIC DRUSE.

THE trucks, the ambulances and the armored cars could carry no more. The regular drivers gave way to wounded men, and themselves took up rifles and bayonets. The wounded that could not find room to ride, dragged from the rear steps, from the fenders, hands about one another's waists, or fell away, unseen and soon forgotten, into the darkness. And the column went on, on....

Quabic and the bloody wreck of the Twenty-Seventh stumbled ahead, clearing the way with grenades or auto-rifles; many times with the bayonet. They knew this road; they had marched up it, a hundred strong, gay and laughing, this afternoon. Now they were going back—and no man, alive or dead, would stop them.

To the right and left clumped the Senegalese *tirailleurs* and Syrian irregulars, comparatively fresh men, and taking the brunt of the incessant flank attacks. Behind, some of their wounded and dead on the few remaining horses, given the honor of the rear-guard position by Quabic, came the last score or so of the Legion troopers—happy that they, also of the Legion, should get the job.

It was in the hour of dawn that they came upon the encampment of the Twenty-Seventh; found the place by the flash of Druse rifles, the blasting chatter of Cauchats from within the stone walls. Right up against the barb-wire, beating back the Druse attack-

ers, they rolled the cars. They dragged the wounded up into the place, and then settled as best they might for that inexorable attack of the Druse Emir at dawn.

In that place were half a dozen officers of different units who ranked Quabic. It was he, though, who gave the orders and organized the defense; in Syria, there had been too many men like the colonel who had made the supreme, and futile, gesture after wasting hundreds of lives.

Between the barbwire and the outer wall, the young Legion captain sent the red-fezzed Senegalese, armed with their Lebel rifles, hand grenades and their beloved *coupe-coupes,* the dreadful pointless but razor-keen knife. They were to break the brunt of the Druse mounted attack, then speedily to fall back within the first wall.

Here Quabic had strategically placed the remaining mounted Syrian *partisans* beside the wall openings. They had their orders to sally forth, when and if that wave was smashed back, and harass its retreat. Here, also, were the heavy machine-guns, and their crews, a number of Cauchat gunners and men with rifle-grenades, all of the Legion; a commingling of the Legion troopers and the men of the Twenty-Seventh.

The inner wall was lined with every available man who could bear and fire a gun. They stood-to at the embrasures, rifles loaded and ready, piles of grenades at their feet, sharp-sided bayonets thrust down into the soil in readiness for any final desperate defense. The dying and seriously wounded were in the stable, tended to by the overworked and half-mad first aid man.

From point to point, the walking wounded carried supplies of rifle ammunition, grenades and rockets. The Druse were many; but they were going to have a hard time of it, anyhow.

TOWNER HALL, staggering into the place with Groulious, was caught by Demol, the first platoon sergeant, who had been left in command by Quabic.

"How goes it?" he had growled at the American. "Are you all right?"

"I can still keep my eyes open; yes. But Groulious is out on his feet."

"So? Take his Cauchat, then, and set up behind this embrasure. You, Greek, sit down on your hams beside him and get a rest; then feed up the ammunition to him as he needs it. Here, you are both good boys—there is a little cold coffee with a good touch of rum in it!"

Hall and Groulious had drunk half the bitter burning stuff between them when they heard the high, far battle cry of the Druse, then that stirring, nerve-shaking pound of dromedary hoofs over the hard ground. Men tensed and were silent. Quabic thrust the muzzle of a Very pistol high, let a rocket go sputtering up. In a solid, concentric wave, the Druse were smashing up the slope, and as far as that light carried, beasts and men were everywhere.

Towner Hall shook his head; he couldn't get excited any more. He had suffered and seen too much. Even the emotion of fear was denied him by his wearied senses. Let them come; let them get killed. Then they would go back, and wait, and come in again; and the Legionnaires would kill them, and once more, they would go back....

There was a thrash and shudder of bodies now—the leading beasts had met that waist-high barbwire. Now

the Senegalese were at them; listen to them yell! His hands rested laxly on the stock of his auto-rifle; he had no orders to fire until the Druse had swung up to the outer wall.

The Senegalese and the Syrian irregulars were having a hard time of it—horses, dromedaries, men, all mixed up in a pain-mad, kicking pack. The bedlam was too terrific for any one individual to gain a clear impression of what was happening.

Tentatively, and to break this dull strain of waiting, he leaned down, found a grenade, jerked the pin and waited until almost the last moment before hurling it in a sharp, quick arc. It smashed into flame out over the barbwire. The light of its explosion showed an awful carnage. The black warriors who fought for France had done their job well, and the Syrians, practically trapped with the wall at their backs, had fought with a maniacal fury.

Between them, they had hurled to a halt the Druse van, shooting and grenading, then going in with the *coupe-coupe,* the bayonet and the saber. But behind the Druse van pressed thousands—men and beasts, hurtling at the gallop. Up against that tangle in the trampled barbwire they smashed, and came on, somehow trickling and snaking through, as the sea would come through a cracked wall.

The order had come from Quabic now, and the men manning the outer wall were letting loose with everything, setting up a masking, withering fire in which the Senegalese and *partisans* could creep back into safety.

Utterly life-careless, the demoniacal columns of Druse swarmed after, facing fully the hot blast of grenades and the crashing, awful hail of lead. Right into the blinking, spitting flame of the Hotchkisses and auto-rifles they sprang, torn, dying, but still able to come on and deal death in return. They hacked the gunners and feeders down, wrenched away Cauchats and Lebels, started to clamber over the wall. It was inhuman, it was impossible, and still it happened!

But the Legionnaires manning that wall were wise in the ways of death. They let the fanatics down inside the wall, and as they leaped downward, spitted them from below, butchered them like so many frantic, helpless sheep with the cruel, long bayonet.

No more came over the wall. It was almost physically impossible for more than a few men at a time to climb through that ghastly mound of corpses that mounted bloodily by the barbwire. And into the darkness beyond, the garrison of the inner wall were lobbing grenades, hurling a transverse machine-gun barrage.

Defeat and death, though, had come fearfully close. Many Druse still crept singly and quietly in through the machine-gun barrage, springing from one heap of dead to the next, to slither madly down over the outer wall and knife out at the defenders there. Innumerable personal combats were going on in the fantastic gray light of dawn. Men locked in one another's arms struggled and fell, bit and stabbed; broke loose, drenched in blood and croaking curses, and drove in toward another shadowy shape.

QUABIC blew his whistle time and again, recalling the men out there back into the safety of the high, inner wall. No massed attack could safely come over that litter of dead beyond the barbwire. The post was practically safe, and the manning of the outer wall could now be readily

discarded until daylight came and foe could see foe.

One by one, Legionnaires, Senegalese, fear-mute Syrians, crawled in through the openings, crying aloud their identities, afraid of being shot down by the nervous men stationed there. Yet between the two walls sporadic fighting still went on, and there was the burbled choking of wounded men, the grunts, rasping exhalations and curses of men fighting body against body. At last, though, that almost died away, and what seemed like quiet came over the place.

Far out on the *bled,* through the dark-bellied mists, the sun came slowly up, setting everything in unreal relief. Groulious, squatting beside the American, let out a little satisfied sigh.

"There will be little more to this, my young one," he murmured. "I have seen it just like this in the Ouergha—the Riff—and at dawn these wolves always slink away. But they will come back, unless that papa wolf, the Emir, has himself been killed. What? Listen!"

From outside the wall, in that space where the terrific personal combat of the last ten minutes had been going on, a low, choked voice had called out. Groulious and Hall looked at one another, and the American, unable to see anything through his loophole, began to straighten up, look over the top of the wall. The old Greek dragged him back.

"Fool!" he hissed. "There are many Druse still alive. And they do not mind how they die, as long as they take a Frenchman with them."

The voice had come again, low, and cautious. Hall shook himself impatiently clear of the Greek.

"Who is there? Give your name, or I shoot!"

"It is Loeffler. You—you are Hall? Come and get me, American, I am shot through the legs. I—"

Hall put one toe in the edge of the loophole, pushed his head and shoulders clear of the wall top. Beside a tangled pile of Druse dead, he saw the huge khaki-uniformed figure of the corporal. Then, instinctively, he ducked, and the bullet keened through the neck cloth of his *képi,* knocking the head piece far behind him. Hall said nothing; he slid backward to the ground, and picked up the *képi.*

"Here, Groulious." He handed the gawping veteran the cap. "Put it on the gun barrel, and shove it up over the parapet, just a bit. So, and no more."

As he spoke, he crouched down behind his Cauchat rifle, lying in its loophole; peered out, the butt against his shoulder, his finger on the trigger.

"Loeffler!" he called gently. "Loeffler! I cannot see you!"

Twice a rifle spat yellow flame from behind that pile of dead, and the *képi* whirled off from the gun muzzle Groulious held.

"Thank you, *mon gars,*" whispered Hall, coming back on the trigger of the Cauchat. "Thank you very much!" The burst was a short one of perhaps half a dozen rounds, the clip running out. Hall unthinkingly reloaded the piece, put it back in the loophole, but did not again look out. He was sure—sure that those half a dozen bullets had found the man who in cold blood had killed his buddy and just now tried to kill him.

"GROULIOUS," he said.

"But yes, American?"

"You are an old man, and your eyes are tired. You cannot see very well. You—you have seen nothing for the last twenty minutes?"

"You forget." Groulious shook his head slightly. "I am the Sphinx, and as blind as the Sphinx. Look—the Druse are retreating, and there, you can hear them, come the pursuit planes and the big bombers. It is over. Quabic will get many medals for this. And you, my young one, you should get one private one, too!"

Towner Hall said nothing. He had picked up his riddled khaki *képi* from the ground, and was very thoughtfully running his finger end around the three small, clean holes. He looked up at the Greek with vague eyes.

"That lieutenant of riflemen is beginning to make a list of the dead and wounded; see him, over there, beside Quabic? And, when they come to clean up and bury our dead, they will find the Corporal Erich Loeffler. He will be full of lead—Cauchat lead. No Druse could capture or operate an auto-rifle of ours. Demol, Quabic, and Marceret knew that you and I had this loophole here, and that I was in charge of the piece. And they will remember Taifkilesh, and the time he and I fought in Sidi bel Abbes. Also, how I promised to get the swine some day." Towner Hall strangely smiled. "From what I hear, these military courts don't want too much evidence, anyhow."

As he spoke, he m e c h a n i c a l l y dropped into the cartridge pouches on his heavy leather belt all the shells they would carry. A dead man's pack and equipment lay against the wall. From it he took some bread and a tin of canned meat; he strapped to his own side the big canteen. He picked up the rifle Groulious had been using, but which was not his own.

"Kiss them all for me, and if you get *en corvée,* in a real bad jam, tell them the truth. When they tack that to the fact I've gone over the hill, they'll let you be."

Steadily and distinctly, but in a low voice, the dazed Greek was cursing him:

"Laugh in their faces! Tell them nothing—tell them the same thing he told Quabic at Taifkilesh. I am your witness. 'I am—"

"But I am no lying dog like him!"

Towner Hall glanced back over his shoulder. Every man who could stand was looking far out and up, southwest, where those vicious little battle planes and the awkward-looking Breguet bombers were machine-gunning and bombing the retreating, demoralized Druse. Towner Hall placed his right hand on the top stones, took a tighter grip on the Lebel, and then sprang from sight over the wall.

Half an hour later, when Quabic and the sergeants made the first roll-call in two days, private of the first class Groulious was found sitting against the wall, an empty pint flask of *rafia,* stolen from the company stores, in his hand, and a vapid but stern look on his cadaverous face.

Private of the second class Towner Hall was among the missing. Men reported having seen him, under arms, alive and unwounded, beside his loophole. Eventually, despite Quabic's reluctance, he was entered on the company rolls as *en promenade*—a deserter, to be shot when found.

CHAPTER IX.

ALONE AMID DESOLATION.

TOWNER HALL could not walk far that day; physically and emotionally, he was all but exhausted. Mixing shrewdness with foolhardiness, he took that grisly road toward Seba

Biar, over which he had so bitterly fought twice in the last twenty-four hours. Some fifteen kilometers from the encampment, his legs and feet gave out on him. He fell where he was, the Lebel pressed between his arms and against his chest, down into the ditch, and slept.

The sharp cold of the Syrian night awoke him. Vultures and jackals were noisily busy up and down the road. Otherwise the bleak, arid stretches of the *bled* were deserted.

For a time, numb, weak and dazed, he sat there on the ditch edge, revolving very slowly in his mind what he had done, and just what he should do. The final decision was that he did not care. One thing only did he persist in: he was not going to be marched forth and shot by his companions of the Twenty-Seventh as a murderer or deserter. Otherwise, it did not matter.

Life, he thought with a sour sort of amusement, had been too big for him ever since that night with Ruth in the speakeasy. Or perhaps he had tried to knock too much down out of life. That was more like it. He had been a pretty good amateur artilleryman in the World War, a fair bond salesman afterward, and, in his fashion, a competent scrapping misfit of the Legion.

There, he'd found the word—a misfit. He'd thrown away—or maybe life had taken it from him against his will—the old, easy, comfortable existence in New York. Now he was an outcast from the Legion, a man who would soon be hunted as a murderer and a deserter.

Well, he might as well get up and push along. Maybe he could make himself man size yet, before the Druse, the Legion, or some other awkward form of death overtook him.

That night, he walked twenty or thirty kilometers, continuing on along the road that led to Makrala, and thus to Seba Biar. Here were dead men, smashed ambulances, burned armored cars, the litter and carnage of that dreadful retreat. He found, without particularly seeking them out, a new rifle, better than his battle-seared piece, and a complete field pack—blankets, spare shoes, uniform and all—near the encampment of the decimated Legion troop.

He was debating about weighting himself down with the things, when a sudden whinny and clatter of hoofs over the shale of the hillside brought him to his knees, Lebel at his shoulder. Then a sort of sobbing laugh came from him. It was a Legion horse, reins dragging at its forefeet, gun still in the saddle scabbard, blanket roll at the back of the saddle. Probably the beast had had its owner shot writhing from the saddle, and had then wandered aimlessly throughout the last day, to come back from time to time to the familiar picket line, scaring off the vultures and the sullen, snarling jackals for the moment.

For a time, Towner Hall stood close at that horse's head, a trembling hand running over the smooth nose and nostrils. In the pack he had found beside the road had been a little French chocolate. He got it out and held it on the palm of his hand, while the big yellow teeth and coarse tongue caught it up. Here, at least, was a companion, something to keep him from going mad.

Leading it by the reins, he went down into the corpse-littered encampment. It was a ghastly job, but at last he found saddlebags and a sack of grain, filled the bags with the stuff. He pushed back the dead from the water hole, let the beast drink, and carefully filled his own two canteens.

Then he mounted and rode on, into the East and into the dawn. In the land before him no man wearing the uniform of France lived. Where he was going, what he was going to do, he did not know, or care.

BEYOND the plain of Makrala, he came into a low but rugged range of mountains. There he found no man and no other living thing except the vultures and the jackals, the little lizards that scuttled for their stones at the sound of his horse's hoofs. Mounted as he was now, he kept a bit away from the road, paralleling it.

That dusk, as he rode slowly down into a small valley, he dimly saw before him a few scraggly palm and olive trees, half a dozen mud-walled huts; and there came to him the sweet, sharp stink of camel-dung fires.

He halted, got down from his mount, stood with his hand gripped lightly over the beast's nostrils so that it would not neigh, for there were many horses and camels picketed around those wells and huts down there. Then he smiled at his action, recognizing in it the instinctive will to live—to go on living, although consciously he had no such purpose or desire.

Darkness fell. He had food for his horse and himself, but no water. Down there were wells—and many armed men who would shoot at the slightest sound and movement beyond their firelight.

Let them! He went down, leading the patient gray by the bridle. He came to the first well. A nodding, skinny boy sat there, wrapped close in his burnoose against the night cold, but weary and full of supper, a bit angry that older men had detailed him to this lonely and stupid sentry's job.

Towner Hall looped the bridle over his shoulder, unstoppered his two canteens, submerged them in the dark water of the shallow little well, then led the beast forward to water. The horse was a good one, and intelligent, but had not seen water like this in days. It let out a snuffling whinny of joy as its head plunged far down. The nodding boy awoke, to stare and grasp for his old-fashioned rifle, which Hall had snaked away and laid down on the other side of the well.

"Be still," whispered the American in the few words of Legion Arabic he had learned.

"*Aiee billah!*" broke forth the boy, recognizing the *képi,* the hated uniform.

"Well!" Hall put one hand against the lad's chest, one foot behind the scrawny shanks, and pushed. The boy fell, howling with fright and rage. Hall could see, backgrounded by the firelight, the figures of running men. He turned, swung up into the saddle, throwing the canteens into position. A heavy rifle cracked, too close for real comfort. He jerked up the Lebel, let go a magazine-load, a yard or so high. Then he gently kicked the gray, and they were sweeping at a gallop off into the darkness.

The gray ran well and easily and, inexpert horseman though he was, Hall realized that there were few mounts that could overhaul this one. Then he heard behind him that peculiar slurring pound of dromedaries.

He laughed sourly, remembering a drunken argument he had overheard one time in Sidi bel Abbes between a Spahi corporal and a native *goum,* a camel-driver in a corps of irregulars fighting for the French. The Spahi had boasted of the speed and staying power of a horse, and the camel-driver

had laughed at him; and finally the Spahi had laughed, too, for, after the first five miles, any good running camel could outrun and outlast any horse.

Hall grinned; there was a kick to this, anyhow. Maybe, too, he could outsmart them. Of course, if they caught him, they would kill him. But anybody in this land would. His mount's hoofs were clacking over shale and rubble now, and queer shapes of outcropping stone rose specterlike to right and left. He pulled back on the bridle, slowing down the gray so that he might hear better.

What he had thought at first was a dozen or so men chasing him, was in reality more than a hundred, or two hundred. He had bumped square into a big Druse *rezzia,* then!

Within an hour, or less, they were almost sure to catch him.

HE slipped down from the saddle, went on on foot, leading the gray between the sharp, small peaks and great bowlders of this strange land of limestone and sand.

Here was a good place. Two huge pillars of wind-chiselled limestone rose far above his head, like a fragment of some old temple. He led the gray right between them, then sat down, content, the Lebel across his knees. For hours, he heard the Druse hunting for him. Twice, small but heavily armed parties on foot went within yards of where he and the gray rested motionless and silent.

Then through that weird place, a wind began to blow, slowly at first, then heightening in intensity. Sand whipped and stung against his face and eyes. He pulled the neck cloth of his *képi* around so that it protected his face, put the canvas feed bag over the head of the gray.

No more men or camels moved about him; this looked like a real sandstorm, and obviously the Druse themselves feared to be caught out in it. Maybe he'd live for another day, then! Softly, he laughed.

Near dawn, the thing fluttered out. Hall dozed where he sat, half buried in sand, one hand clamped about the bridle of the gray. It was the neighing and stamping of the horse that awakened him. He grunted, stood up, shook the sand from his clothing, then struggled out into the open and up the sand-drifted slope, toiling knee-deep in the stuff.

He topped a rise, looked down and back, then flung himself into the saddle, kicked the gray in the ribs. Very nearly a thousand men, horses, camels and dromedaries were gathered there about those wells in the little oasis. And high above one man's head bellied the big blue battle banner. It looked as if the country was lousy with fighting men!

But where was this gang bound? Against the French, or on some raiding job of their own, against another tribe or clan? Then, through the sun shimmer on the sandy *bled* beneath him, far away and all but hidden from sight, he saw a long, snakelike column of men and animals.

That column moved very, very slowly as if sorely tired, or heavily loaded. Suddenly Towner Hall laughed. This was the best guessing game he had ever been in; but he thought he had the answer to it.

That column far out were Jebel Druse, and undoubtedly a huge segment of that force which had been at Makrala. Now they were going back to Seba Biar, carrying their wounded and dead, and all the loot they had found along the road.

These other boys, the ones back there by the well, were not Jebel Druse; what little he knew about their equipment and manner of dress told him that. They were probably Wahabis, Ateiba, Howeitat—any one of a number of tough raiding tribes from the South and the Nefudh desert.

They were waiting for customers—for these returning Jebel Druse, with their weary camels, wounded and loot. A nice business, which he would see complete, if he could hide himself. Somehow, he had the sensation he was a kid playing hooky from school—

The gray whinnied and shivered nervously. Hall spun around, the Lebel at his hip. Half a dozen horsemen, face cloths over their mouths, were on the rise above, in a rough half circle, the sun aglint on their polished gun barrels. The American smiled; this looked like it now. He dropped the rifle at his feet, raised his hands high over his head.

They trotted down to him, swiftly, and in silence. Two of them slid from their saddles, took the Lebel, the cavalry gun from the saddle scabbard, the bayonet from his hip.

One of them, a youth with the beginnings of a beard on his swart chin, wrenched off his pack, and started to go through it, making guttural noises of pleasure and surprise. But his companion, hawk-nosed and with a small, pointed gray beard, snapped a sharp order, and the youth stood up, shamefaced, his hands empty.

WITH a jewelled dagger drawn from his waist cloth, the older man cut a chunk from the back of the American's khaki tunic, bound his hands behind his back, not uncomfortably. Then he snapped another order at the youth, remounted and rode on down the slope, where the other four were already riding at a swift canter.

Towner Hall turned and gave the Arab lad a curious smile, and indicated with his head the far-off column. For a moment, the other scowled, then gave a shy half-grin, and nodded, tapping his gun barrel. Very suddenly now, the plain below was filled with men, those he had seen last night and this morning encamped about the wells on the other side of the limestone plateau.

They rode strung out and fast, one man, with the green headcloth of the Meccan pilgrim, bearing before him the huge, fluttering battle banner. The distant camel column had halted; from it men advanced, shooting as they came. The faint slam of the rifles echoed over to them even here.

"*Weled 'Ali!*"

Towner and his guard, preoccupied with the distant battle, swung around, startled.

A small, square man on a great white stallion, had ridden noiselessly down through the sand behind them. Some yards to his rear, rode a score of other men, a number of them negro slaves, and dressed in the simple *abbas* of servants. The small man came stiffly down from his mount, and the lad sprang to take the braided camel's hair reins.

Limping, the small man dragged himself squarely before the American.

"A man of the French Legion, eh?" the commander asked in harsh but clear French.

"But yes, *caid*. I was."

"Was?" Beneath the beautiful lace covering of his head cloth, the old *caid's* eyes warmed with an odd light. "You have deserted, then?"

"So they would tell you back there."

"A foolish thing, no?"

"That is so, yes. But I am a fool."

The old chief smiled, without pleasure.

"I have seen your kind before, *roumi*. One of them fought with me for months, until he wanted to make love to a girl of the tribe—and I was forced to kill him."

"I don't want that. I am just *en promenade;* enjoying the sights."

"But you carry two rifles, a bayonet?"

"The tools of my old trade; they are of small use to me."

"You do not fear death, then?"

"Death might be a pleasure."

"But you have heard how the desert tribes kill a *roumi*—to his neck, deep in an ant hill?"

"If I believed that, I would fear it. My rifle, there, is loaded. I could have killed myself before your men had me. This boy here will tell you so."

The old *caid* slowly fingered the delicately carved scarab at his waist.

"You are mad, *roumi*," he said then. "An unbeliever, and a man wearing the uniform of France, cannot go through El Nefudh alive. We of the tribes will not have it."

"Kill me, then," said Towner Hall tonelessly. "I have not the will to do it myself."

A chuckle of true merriment came from the *caid*:

"I have seldom denied a *roumi* that privilege. But, we will wait until this is over."

In the scorching heat of noon the raid came to an end. Back over the *bled* trailed the camel-men, the riders and the slaves, driving before them weary pack dromedaries loaded heavily with loot—French rifles, machine-guns, every describable type of war material that the Druse had lifted from the deserted posts along the road to Seba Biar. And in addition, they bore all the trappings and arms of the Druse. But no living captive came with them; Towner Hall watched carefully for that.

CHAPTER X.

WITH BARE HANDS.

LIMPING here and there, the old *caid* made a count of the spoils, then ordered camp pitched where it was. Palm fiber mats, rich cushions and Turkestani rugs were spread out; over them they set up the dark camel's-hair tents. Slaves gathered over fires and cooking pots; there was the screech of goats having their throats cut.

About the American and his mount, a steadily increasing crowd of hilarious and hoarse-voiced warriors gathered. They were drunk with blood and victory; here was a butt for their pleasure and amusement.

Although the young guard shook his head and tried to keep them back, the bronze-faced, hairy men pushed in and fingered the metal bits of the American's uniform, knocked off his *képi* and tore the grenade insignia from the front, jerked loose his buttons, rifled his pockets, finally unwrapped, with roars of laughter, his roll puttees.

Towner Hall said nothing, and felt very little. All his old fierceness and anger had drained from him; he was stunned, stupid, careless, but with enough pride of race left to keep calm and voiceless through all this.

It was only when one hulking, apelike negro slave went over to the shivering gray and started to strip off the bridle, saddle and cloth, that Hall returned fully to consciousness for the first time in hours.

He loved that gray. In this world

which had suddenly smashed away from under him, leaving him hopeless, alone and hunted, it was the one living thing to which he could give his love and attention. And now the chattering negro slave, obviously the wit and comic figure of this tribal horde, was beginning to play with the horse, tired of stripping all the buckles and straps from the saddle and bridle.

With his splayed, thick fingers he grasped the gray's nostrils, making simian gestures to the ring of warriors that he meant to examine the beast's teeth, thus learn its age. The high-strung gray quivered and stamped, tried to break away. One forehoof glanced down on the big slave's bare foot. A yowl of rage came from him. With his clenched fists, he beat the horse across the sensitive parts of the nose and neck.

Then Towner Hall walked forward and lifted him clear of the ground with a kick of his Legionnaire *brodequin*. It knocked the simian one headlong, up against the wall of startled warriors. Then the black turned, and his little eyes were gleaming slits, his thick yellow teeth exposed.

"*Wellah!*" he barked.

He whipped a knife from the waistband of his dirty drawers, his sole garment. Towner Hall poised, and kicked again. The knife tangented out into the crowd. A great, wild roar rose up from the warriors.

Then a silence came, and the men fell back. The old *caid* stood there, his two personal bodyguards at his back. Coldly, he asked a question of the squirming black, who held his left wrist tightly in his right hand. Then the *caid* turned, trembling in an awful ague of anger, and his deep-set, almost black eyes pierced at Towner Hall.

"You have kicked my servant, *roumi!* You have shamed a slave of my tribe before my warriors!"

"Your slave beat my horse about the eyes and nose with his fists," snapped Hall. "No man can do that—to a horse that is mine."

For a time, the *caid* stood silent, brown claws of hands caught about the belt of semi-precious stones at his waist. Then he turned in the sand, so that he faced the crouched slave, and his staring, silent horde of warriors. He spoke first to the negro, but only shortly; then rasped a half dozen sentences at the warrior pack. One guttural word which Towner Hall could not understand came back. This is death, he thought. At last—

But the *caid* was speaking to him in French:

"The slave you have kicked has the desire to kill you with his two hands, *roumi*. And the men of the tribe wish to witness that pleasurable thing. For you, it is better than the ant hill."

From his belt, he pulled forth his Damascene dagger; with it, he cut the bonds holding Towner Hall's hands.

"Now," he said, and made a gesture. One of his bodyguard led away the shivering gray. The ring gave back a bit. In the front rank the chieftain himself found a place.

THE negro slave had stood up. With a mouthed cry, he wrenched clear his filthy drawers; stood there, crouched, snarling, stark naked.

Towner Hall's stiff fingers found his torn tunic collar. He ripped the thing off, his undervest and shirt also. His *képi* he jammed down on the back of his head, in that automatic gesture he had learned in the Legion. Then he smiled and came forward, hands loose at his sides.

The huge black's eyes were shot with

red; the thick-lipped mouth was twisting, and from one corner a froth of saliva drooled down. The man was mad for the time, saw Hall, and in that red glance he read death. He never saw those eyes again. The slave was at him, with the sure speed and startling attack of a true wrestler.

Hall was hampered by his heavy *brodequins;* he very nearly missed escaping that charge. But even as he swung away and aside, one great black hand clamped about his right wrist, wrenched it back, threw him over on his shoulder and side in the sand. A howl came from the warriors.

The black's hand was sweeping up the arm toward the shoulder and throat. The sweaty, stinking black torso was pressing down, down, thrust forward by the straining legs, dug deep in the sand. The slave sought a hammerlock, then a strangle hold; and he had the weight and speed, the brute strength, to get it. But he had left the whole side of his head exposed.

Square on the ear lobe Towner Hall struck him with an overhanding blow that started from the sand. It smashed the sensitive membrane flat, shot stupefying pain through the wrestler's brain. In a convulsive burst of strength, that hammerlock tightened, and Hall gagged with agony, his whole body atremble.

Again he hit, up over his head and back, elbow pointed high. It was the mouth he found this time, splitting the lips open, drenching himself with the other's blood.

Now was his time—now! His feet plowed deeply at the sand. He tensed his wiry little body, flung up, up, up, twisting and shifting, until he was on his feet—his back arched terribly over, his head spinning, but on his feet.

The black was strangling him with a tenacity of purpose that was superhuman. Hall's eyes stood far out from their sockets. His mouth was open, and small choking sounds rasped forth, as he tried to breathe. For just a moment they staggered there, the black man bearing down and back with his superior weight, shifting his feet so that he might trip and throw this man who had borne him bodily erect with him.

The naked calf and thigh locked behind Hall's; the slave grunted as he changed his grip. And Hall bore down on that bare foot with his huge hobnailed *brodequin,* found the arch, the writhing toes, ground hard, hard.

That pain was awful. For a split second, the strength went out of the black man's hold, and Towner Hall jabbed an elbow back against the face, broke loose.

He slipped and almost fell in the treacherous sand, and heard the whistling breath of the other right at his ear. He snapped his head and body up. The rear of his skull caught the slave right on the point of the jaw. A cry of guttural agony came from the negro; he had bitten his tongue almost in two.

They stood reeling there, unable to see one another clearly, sobbing with the agony of breathing, weak with the pain of burning muscles and overtaxed hearts. But the black had the instinct and speedy recovery of an animal. He lunged forward, hands clawing for another hold.

Towner Hall rested on his heels, came back, came ahead, striking overhead and down, a long, whistling blow. His mark was the base of the brain, at that sweat-glistening, broad neck. He found it, and sent the knuckles of his hand crunching inward. The reflex action of that pain brought the negro

erect, swaying, but still conscious. He edged in, groping, crying out horribly.

With both hands, the American hit—to the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the throat, in a rain of smacking, crunching blows. The negro fell, gulping and shrieking with the pain of those smashed cartilages.

Hall fell beside him, rolled, was on top of him. His hands would not function. From his finger tips to his shoulders was a region of awful flame. Blood spurted from his gums as he clenched his teeth, thrust down with his fingers, found the knotted throat cords, the gullet.

It took him perhaps a minute, or less, and the man beneath him beat and kicked with the convulsive strength of desperation. But in one last burst, the great back arched, the legs thrashed, and it was then over.

HALL pulled back his hands. The black, bloody face was a ghastly mask of death. Out from the convulsed body, the life had gone.

He had killed a man—killed a man with his bare hands. He started to break away, to stand up. He fell, cursing his weakness in a voice that was nothing but a whisper.

He could not see; the pounding of his heart deadened all other sound. How long he lay there he never knew. When they pulled him upright to his feet, his knees gave beneath him, and he would have fallen once more. But the dark clouds had gone before his eyes, and he could see, in front of him, the gray horse that had been his.

He muttered something deep down in his throat, and they let go of him. He half walked, half fell, over to the gray, caught hold of the stirrup-strap, and so came to his feet. He clung gasping to the saddlecloth and empty scabbard.

Then a certain intelligence, a certain clarity of thought came to him, and he looked around. The *caid* stood there, hands about the jeweled belt, a cold, queer smile on the thin lips.

"Mount, *roumi*," he said softly. "Get on your horse. You are to live. You have earned the right to live—for a time. You are to ride back, the way you have come. I and my tribe have fought against every clan in the desert; we have fought the Turk, the English, and the Druse. We have beaten the Druse. The Druse have raided and defeated the French. Now I and my tribe come. If they are all like you, *roumi*, they are warriors worth a battle with my tribe. Tell your *caid* these things. Tell him I come, and so warn him of fair battle. I will give you until the going of the sun. Then my men come. You will be pegged out alive for the jackals if the warriors find you. Ride!"

Somehow Towner Hall brought himself fully erect beside his gray horse. In that moment, with those words, he had become a man with a purpose, a vocation, an ambition. He was a Legionnaire. His own smile matched that of the proud old desert raider's.

"We," he muttered, "we of the Legion fight well, *caid!*"

Then he hooked his elbows over the gray's back, found the stirrup iron with his toe, swung with terrific effort up into the saddle. To him his hands were useless; for the time being they were wrecks of throbbing fire. His knees tightened in against the gray's sides. The warrior horde parted and dropped back.

For a long time, until the orders of their *caid* sent them to their own mounts, they watched in a strange sort

of silence that bloody, battered man who reeled and swayed to the galloping of his splendid horse, but rode on nevertheless.

CHAPTER XI.

MAN SIZE.

A SPAHI patrol brought Towner Hall into the encampment of the Twenty-Seventh beyond Makrala. They rode very slowly, for the gray horse he sat was dying on its feet, and the man in the saddle was bound there with picket ropes so that he would not fall headlong to the ground.

For a long while they were unaware of his identity. That he was a Legionnaire they could tell by the blood-blackened trousers, the big *brodequins* and the issue saddle and bridle of the dying horse. But otherwise he was unrecognizable; his face a blue-black pulp, his hands two gigantic, swollen festers, his only sounds a low, indistinguishable murmur.

It took the first aid man and two of the sergeants over an hour to bring him to. Then through the bandages Hall croaked:

"Quabic! Bring *le capitaine*, Quabic!"

Quabic came and stood before him. Between the bandage slits, the wounded man's eyes burned up at the tall captain.

"I am that one, Hall, *mon capitaine*. He who killed the corporal and deserted. Out there, the desert ones captured me. I killed a man—their toughest man—with my two hands. And now, Quabic, because of me, they are coming to fight the Legion. For, this morning, they raided and wiped out the Druse who fought us at Makrala. They are coming, Quabic, coming. Many of them—many."

Quabic clucked his tongue against his teeth. The American had passed into a deep coma. The big captain wheeled, and the bugler, understanding that change in posture and expression, swept his bugle up to his lips.

"To arms!" Quabic loosed his sword in its scabbard. "You, Demol, you, Marceret!" Then he beckoned to him the corporal of the Spahi patrol which had brought this man in. "You found him where?"

"On the road to Seba Biar, *mon capitaine*."

"So! It is true, then. That man could not lie. Go, yourself, along the road. Every patrol is to fall back here, at once. Send your best man, on your fastest horse, west, to posts six and five. They are to assemble here at once, and to send on the word to that battalion of the Legion in the Oasis of Boukreida. Swiftly, corporal!"

"Swiftly, my captain!"

Towner Hall awoke during the night. High overhead, rockets cracked and spluttered. There was the pulsing chatter of machine guns, of Cauchats, the reiterant slam of rifle salvos. This was battle. It had come, then. And he had been in time. That was good—quite good.

He tried to straighten up, to see what went on close about him.

"Be still, you."

He turned his head. A powder-grimed man crouched close by him in the hospital-stable, bandaging a flesh wound in his thigh.

It was Groulious.

"Hello, you dog!" grunted the American.

"*Machache!*" muttered old Groulious. "The hero speaks!" He reached inside his tattered tunic, found two

cigarettes and his benzine lighter. He gave one to himself, one to Hall, and lit both.

"You are a hero, my frog-face, and no less. Trust old Groulious to know the signs. Hey? No! Myself, I told Quabic. You had filled him full, that Loeffler. But, also, through the back, were three Druse bullets. And accidents will happen in battle; so the captain Quabic said then. And a deserter, if he is a crazy American, can sometimes make himself out, on the records, as 'a scout on detached duty.' Lie still; it is Marceret!"

THE senior lieutenant lurched down into the stable, a sorely wounded man in his arms. He set him down, bawled a word at the sweating first aid man, and turned to go.

"How goes it now, my lieutenant?" asked Groulious.

"Good, my old one," smiled back the lieutenant. "The boys from Boukreida have just struck them on the flank now. We ourselves have piled back five of their attacks. The battle planes and the Breguets are just waiting for dawn and the light to see. Then it will be another victory for the Legion, and another citation in general orders and a battle star for the Twenty-Seventh. How is that one beside you there? Has he come out yet?"

"But no, lieutenant. Does he go against the wall?"

"The wall! Not while Quabic, or I, or you, even, my old one, live to put into the records what has gone on tonight. Now, rest easy!"

Marceret swung away, scrambling up the side of the pit, nudging his automatic out into his hand again. Softly Groulious laughed, screwed around so that he could look at the prone figure of the American.

"You heard all that?"

"Yes—" it came chokingly "—yes!"

But then Towner Hall seemed to fall back into the coma which had held him before. At six o'clock, when it was all over, the first aid man and Quabic shook him gently awake. The first aid man heeled away; despite his great curiosity in this matter, there were many men who needed his aid yet. But Quabic knelt down on one knee beside the wounded man.

"It is the company and the Legion, through me, who thank you, American. The Twenty-Seventh will never forget this night."

"But, *mon capitaine*—that Loeffler—I shot him down. I—"

"Be still, Legionnaire!" commanded Quabic quietly.

"But, I—I—"

"Be still, you! You have done the company and the Legion a great service—two great services. Now, be still!"

Towner Hall firmly clamped his lips together. Beneath the hindering bandages, he closed his eyelids, for he knew that tears were gathering there. And, also, he knew that a Legionnaire, man size, did not weep—ever.

THE END.

He knew he had turned over several times before he landed

War Ribbons

A spy pulled a new trick in division headquarters behind the lines in France—and gave Sergeant-Major Cody all the action that warrior craved

By FRED M. WHITE

"OF all the cock-eyed, tin-plated, haywire contraptions in this louse-bound A. E. F.," the sergeant-major was saying, "these knock-kneed, bow-legged, loose-jointed typewriters in this office take the lady's hand-painted gas mask. I wish something 'd blow 'em to—"

Who-o-o-o-o-m! Crash!

The office wall bulged inward, and the sergeant-major had a glimpse of his buddy, the corporal, on the floor as he himself was hurled through the open door. He knew he turned over several times, because he saw green, which was grass, and blue, which was sky. There was a tooth-rattling jolt, and the sergeant-major found himself sitting on the ground with his typewriter on his lap.

Clouds of dust and sickish-sweet smoke billowed from the *hôtel de ville*, the town hall, which the chief of staff had taken over that morning for division P. C. Far above, a Fokker bomber with black crosses on its wings headed back for Germany.

As his brain cleared, the sergeant-

major mumbled, in an awed tone, "Gosh—next time I'll sure be careful what wishes I make!" Then he recalled that there was a war on. He thought of the corporal, and jumped to his feet, the typewriter clattering to the ground and spilling its works.

"Skinny!" he yelled. "Hey, Skinny!"

There was no answer, and the sergeant-major bolted for the sagging doorway through which he had been blown. He bumped into the corporal, who was backing out, tugging at a heavy box.

"Skinny!" The sergeant-major gripped him by the shoulders. "You damn' long-legged scarecrow, thank God you weren't killed!"

"Leggo, Buff, and gimme a hand with this box, will yuh?"

"Box hell! Come out o' here. This place is likely to fall down any minute."

"I know, Buff, but we gotta get this box out. It's got the sector maps in it."

THEY dragged the box outside, salvaged the chief of staff's sacred files and sat on the pile. A young man with a pink, round face, in a tight serge uniform and leather puttees, stepped around a corner. The two soldiers started to attention, saw their mistake and sat down again. From the crossed quills on the collar this must be a field clerk, half-soldier, half-civilian.

"I am looking," the newcomer said precisely, "for division post of command."

The sergeant-major waved a hand to include the northern part of France, the sector maps and files. "Buddy," he answered, "you've found it."

Men were running about the grounds now. Others cleared away the wreckage where the bomb had hit. An ambulance arrived and was loaded.

It was mid-October, 1918. The Ninety-Ninth Division had just moved into the lines somewhere east of Grand Pré. Château Thierry and St. Mihiel were history. The American army had made first down in the Meuse-Argonne and was preparing to buck again.

The sergeant-major who ran the office of the chief of staff was William Cody, better known as Buff because he had once, misjudging the kick of Benedictine, announced that he was the original Buffalo Bill Cody. His buddy, who worked always at his left elbow, was Corporal Krause, known as Skinny.

Any officer, looking at Buff Cody, knew instantly that he was a good soldier. Any girl knew he was a good dancer. His overseas cap perched at just the right angle over a mass of crisp blond curls. His uniform fitted, despite the fact that it was government issue. His leggings lay smooth over shapely calves, and even his hobnailed shoes were neat.

Skinny's uniform looked as if he had found it. He was too long in the middle, and his leggings seemed about to collapse over his ankles. His shoes were larger than appeared necessary, and he wore an expression as if he had just said the wrong thing.

Skinny arranged his feet now and stood up while Buff became a blond statue beside him. Together they snapped a salute as around the corner came another tailored uniform with silver eagles on the shoulders. The chief of staff was slim, dark and fiery. The lines in his face and the row of ribbons on his coat spoke of years in the regular army. He addressed the sergeant-major.

"Any one hurt in the office?"

"No, sir."

"Got all the stuff out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pick a detail, clean out the stable and move in. Everything else is full."

"Yes, sir."

"Well?" This was to the field clerk.

"Sir," recited that soldier-civilian, "Field Clerk Loveridge reports to the chief of staff for duty." He offered his credentials, which the colonel examined.

"All right," snapped the chief of staff. "I asked Corps for a field clerk and they sent me your name yesterday. Let's see your dog tags."

The field clerk blushed, displayed a bangle on his wrist and from under his tight coat fished out the other aluminum disk.

"All right," said the colonel again. "Sergeant-major Cody will tell you what to do."

THE new office could have been worse. After it was swept and scrubbed, only a faint aroma suggested the former occupants. When the last of the precious documents had been moved, the stable became a division P. C. with telephones, desks and maps in place, ready for the war to proceed.

But of the two typewriters, one was a total loss and the other a partial wreck. The sergeant-major looked them over and nudged the corporal.

"Skinny, old kid," he chuckled, "the damn' things are *finee*. They *ne march pah*. The army 'll have to give us some new ones now."

"Perhaps I could help," the field clerk offered. "I was once a typewriter mechanic."

Ignoring Buff's scowl, he turned the less damaged machine on its side and poked about its interior. "There's a ratchet broken and some of the type bars are bent," he diagnosed.

"There," he said ten minutes later, "it can be operated now."

"All right, Loveridge," Buff ordered. "One of your jobs will be to keep these damn' typewriters in order."

Loveridge went to wash his hands, leaving Buff and Skinny alone in the office.

"What you think of the new guy?" asked Skinny. "Kind of sissified, ain't he, with his shiny fingernails and his uniform so tight he can't hardly breathe?"

"Sissified? Not any. He may be a little overfed, but that guy's an athlete."

"Well," Skinny wanted to know, "if he's so athaletic why ain't he in the army?"

"Same reason we're here," Buff explained sourly. "Knows too much about a typewriter to be spared to use a rifle. Next time there's a war I'm not goin' to let on I know a thing, and they'll make me a major."

Colonel Trent strode into the stable, puffing at a cigarette. Little clouds of smoke billowed up around his head. Some army wag in the old days had said that Trent, like the plains Indians, sent up smoke signals when there was dirty work ahead. When he spoke it was in staccato bursts of words, like a machine gun.

"That bomb that hit our P. C. was not an accident. The bomber was shot down, this side of the lines. The pilot was half conscious. He talked a lot of German. Intelligence took it all down. Men, the Germans have a spy right in this division headquarters and I want it known."

The colonel let this fact sink in, then fired another clip.

"I'm telling you men this so you'll be careful. Keep your mouths shut. Don't talk about your work. Not even to each other. Now I'm going to dictate a battle order. Are you ready, corporal?"

Skinny Krause, for all his awkwardness, was a champion typist, and there being now only one typewriter in running order, Skinny had it. He flipped a clean sheet of paper into the machine and poised his knobby fingers on the keyboard. The colonel and his two non-coms were the only persons in the office, but the chief of staff put his lips close to Skinny's ear and dictated in a low voice that barely carried to the sergeant-major.

Buff caught only enough to know that one brigade, the first, of the Ninety-Ninth Division was to jump off at midnight in a surprise attack on Mont Dur. Buff's eyes went to the red and black lines of the daily battle map on the wall. Days ago the American line had been pushed in on each side of Mont Dur, so that now that eminence commanded a salient held by the Germans which made a deep dent in American territory. Before the American general advance could go forward, this salient must be reduced.

Another phrase came to Buff over the purr of the typewriter. Intelligence reported Mont Dur thinly held. Only two regiments of Germans were there. It was best, therefore, to take the position by surprise, without preliminary shelling.

Skinny twirled the order from his typewriter. The colonel scratched his signature and spoke again: "You two are the only men, besides the general and his staff, who know about this order. If you don't want to be stood up against a wall and shot full of holes you'll keep your—"

Field Clerk Loveridge was mincing into the stable-office.

IN a moment the snorting of a motorcycle faded away as the sealed order sped to brigade P. C. Here was one order that would not leak by tapped wire or intercepted radio, and it was typed so there could be no misunderstanding. Another motorcycle dashed away—a second courier sent to watch the first.

It was dark by the time the day's work was cleaned up. The corporal followed the sergeant-major to the Lister bag.

"Gosh!" sputtered Skinny as he spat out the dregs of chlorinated lime. "I wisht we had some francs so we wouldn't hafta drink this stuff."

"Yeah?" questioned Buff. "Still, when you had francs, you had to buy lace hankies to send home to your girl."

"Well, I gotta do somethin', ain't I? She's runnin' around with a second looie, in the spruce division back home. Anyhow, even if I ain't got stripes clear to my shoulder, I don't know but buyin' hankies is as good a way to get rid of francs as losin' 'em to a crooked company barber in a black-jack game. Huh? How about that, big boy?"

"All right, buddy," Buff grinned as they sauntered back to the office. "Anyhow, we're both flat and it's three weeks to pay-day. I'm smoking issue tobacco."

"Aw, say," exclaimed Skinny in quick sympathy. "I ain't that low yet. Here, take a pack; I got some more."

They were back in the glare of the office now. "You fellows get some sleep," Buff directed. "I'll stick around awhile." The sergeant-major closed the door after them and gave the office a final checking-over. Desk tops were

clean, his old typewriter in his absence had been oiled and equipped with a fresh ribbon, and the files had been left in perfect order. He heard a step behind him.

"How's the new man's work, sergeant?" The colonel's tone was habitually crisp.

"Neat and pretty, sir," Buff answered. "I think he's going to make us a good man."

"He comes well recommended," said the chief of staff. "He—Listen!"

The air was filled with the beat of a half-dozen airplane motors.

"Douse the lights!" snapped the colonel.

BUFF and Colonel Trent groped into the starlit night. The roar of the planes was right overhead. A searchlight, then another stabbed the dark. A tawny bird-shape flitted into the glare and was gone, to be picked up again in the beam and followed. The A. A. gun beside the searchlight barked with a spurt of fire. After what seemed a long time a shrapnel shell burst like a glorified rocket a mile above.

Wham! Wham! Wham!

As fast as they could load on the recoil the gunners sent more shrapnel at the shadowy night bombers. Buff tensed for the rising note of a fan-tail bomb.

"Damn!" came from the colonel, and there was a sharp edge to his voice. "There's supposed to be another A. A. battery at the end of this street. Let's see what's the matter there."

They hurried along a high stone wall. The motors of the death carriers droned lower as the planes circled nearer their target. Behind, the A. A. guns barked like very small dogs.

The colonel gripped Buff's arm and pulled him to a halt. Beyond the wall a light flickered from the ground and was gone. Again it shone, on and off, on and off. Short flashes, long flashes. They crept toward the flickering light.

"Give me a boost up here," the colonel whispered, "then go find the gate."

The colonel was up and over, and Buff felt along the wall. He found the gate ajar. As he shouldered through into the garden the earth shook with the first bomb of the raid. Two more blasts followed, then three in a row.

A few yards ahead in the garden a light flashed on the wall and Buff made for the spot. The colonel was before him, and Buff arrived to find the chief of staff gripping a gangling O. D. figure by the shoulder. In one hand of the captive was a flash light. A sickening realization came to Buff. Skinny Krause!

The colonel was doing the talking: "What the devil are you shooting a light around here for?"

Skinny's blue eyes were round and innocent in the starlight. "I was lookin' for snails."

"Snails!" the colonel snorted.

"Uh-huh, I mean yes, sir. Big ones. The French people eat 'em and they'll trade *vin rouge* for 'em. You find 'em along the bottom of a wall like this."

Skinny snapped on the light and the colonel struck it from his hand.

"Snails, eh? During an air raid! You're under arrest. Sergeant, don't let him out of your sight."

Buff was left with Skinny.

"Well, listen," said Skinny dumbly to his pal. "If they're gonna get you in a raid, they'll get you, no matter where you are." He looked after the disappearing figure of the colonel, then bent to recover the flash light.

"Gimme that," Buff ordered, and thrust it into his pocket. The roar of the planes died away. Lights came on cautiously in the little town. The raid was over.

Skinny plodded ahead.

"Of all the damn' fool tricks," Buff stormed, "to be shooting off a flash light during an air raid. What made you think of looking for snails?"

"Somebody told me—lessee, it was Loveridge, I guess," Skinny said. "He showed me how to hunt 'em. Look at 'em. I got three big ones."

Buff groaned.

BUFF was roused by a light in his eyes and the red letters "M. P." stared at him from a blue brassard.

"What's up?" he asked sleepily.

"Colonel Trent wants you right away," the M. P. told him, and turned to wake Skinny Krause.

Buff clumped out into the night. Away to the north the sky glowed with rockets and shell bursts. At this distance the crash of the guns was blended into a low roar, felt rather than heard.

Skinny and the M. P. followed Buff to the cold stable-office where Colonel Trent waited, blue-gray puffs from his cigarette rising about his head. He fired the first clip as he returned their salute.

"At ease, sergeant. M. P., take this corporal to the guard house."

The colonel waved his hand. Skinny, with a half grin that was meant to be reassuring, shambled through the doorway; the M. P., hand on pistol butt, followed.

"Might I ask, sir," Buff ventured as the footsteps died away, "what is the charge against Corporal Krause?"

"Espionage," the colonel snapped. "Yesterday I dictated a battle order to him and last night we found him with that flash light—well, read that and get to work."

The colonel tossed a sheaf of papers on the sergeant-major's desk. Casualty reports. Company after company wiped out. Whole regiments shot to pieces—three thousand American soldiers, men of the first brigade, killed or wounded. Clipped to the casualty reports was the "daily summary of information" put out by the divisional intelligence section—G-2's daily brag. A paragraph leaped out of the typewritten page:

> Unquestionably the enemy was informed of the contemplated attack on Mont Dur. Reconnaissance at 5 P.M. showed only two regiments of enemy troops holding this position, but prisoners interviewed during the engagement revealed that the enemy was massing his forces there as early as 9 P.M. in expectation of attack. At the start of our assault, midnight, there were at least five German divisions and the necessary support and specialty troops in line against our first brigade.

"Massing at 9 P.M.," Buff thought aloud. "The battle order left here at eight o'clock. That means the German staff got it about the same time as our brigade P. C."

"And it means," snorted the colonel, "that Krause must be a German spy. He was signaling, of course, to the Germans in the planes when we found him. As soon as I can get this mess at the front cleaned up and get enough officers back here for a court-martial I'll have him shot!"

Buff had heard of many a court-martial but never an acquittal. He was tormented by a picture of his buddy facing a firing squad with that dumb, apologetic look in his eyes.

He tried to get rid of the idea by tearing into the pile of work on his desk. The first message was headed:

Department of Criminal Investigation
Intelligence Section
First Army

He read on: A man had been found, murdered and stripped in a patch of woods in the Ninety-Ninth Division's rear area. Would the Ninety-Ninth Division please report any men missing who might fit the following description: *et cetera, et cetera.*

Buff typed a memorandum for the colonel's initials, referring the inquiry to divisional G-2, with the information that no man of the Ninety-Ninth was missing except in action. He added the suggestion that an effort be made to identify the dead man from finger-prints on file at central records office, Tours.

TO Buff, the report of a murder was only an incident in the day's work. With half his mind he disposed of the office routine, while, through a long forenoon, he grappled with the mystery of the stolen battle order. Out of a maze of thinking he derived two conclusions: one, the information somehow had leaked from this very office; two, that he, Buff Cody, would watch that field clerk.

The colonel broke in on Buff's thinking. "In spite of what happened last night," he machine-gunned, "I'm going to put another combat order in writing. Ready?"

As he dictated, Buff wrote the order:

C. O., 2D INF. BRIG., 99TH DIV.

Your brigade will attack Mont Dur at 4:30 A.M. to-morrow after brief artillery preparation. Success of this maneuver is vital to the advance of the entire American army. Mont Dur will be taken and held at all costs. By order of Major-general Howard.

Official

.....
CHIEF OF STAFF.

Then the colonel dictated to the commanding officer of the artillery brigade his part in the attack.

As he finished writing, Buff was struck by the biggest idea of his life, one that was to shape the adventures of a hectic night. Would the spy, whoever he was, steal a fake order known only to Buff himself?

When he was alone again, Buff once more slipped clean paper into his typewriter. In correct military form he countermanded the attack on Mont Dur and ordered the Ninety-Ninth Division out of the lines and twenty kilometers west, there to join with the French Sixth Corps in an attack. The maneuver must be a surprise. "By order of Major-general Howard. Official." A row of dots for the signature.

Buff pulled the paper from his machine, lighted a cigarette, touched the flame to a corner of the sheet and watched it burn. Under his hobnailed heel he ground and scattered the ashes. Let the spy steal *that* order if he could!

From the blur of his day's work, one other detail stood out. That was an order for sundry high ranking officers to report at division P. C. at ten o'clock the next morning as members of a general court. That would be Skinny's trial. It would take about an hour. If the real spy was not shown up before eleven o'clock the next morning, Skinny would be condemned to death.

The army made one concession to the stripes on Buff's sleeve. After the day's work was done and night had fallen, it let him talk with Skinny Krause while a staff captain stood by.

"It's a lousy shame, buddy," Buff began, through the crack in the door. "It's a damn' outrage."

"Aw, hell," Skinny answered. "They's bound to be some mistakes made in this war. I guess they had to pinch somebody. When's my trial?"

"To-morrow, buddy."

"Say, Buff, will you do me one favor?"

"Sure, Skinny, anything."

"Well, when it's all over will you see that I go into the casualty report 'killed in action' or 'accident' or somethin' so my girl won't know what really happened?"

Buff found that something smarted his eyes and choked him, but he managed to get out: "Gosh, buddy, it won't come to that." In his heart he knew that, unless he could prevent, it would come to just that. He could stand no more. With a hurried "S'long, Skinny, see you to-morrow," he stumbled out into the night.

BUFF walked without thought of where he was going. Each step marked a second that brought nearer the hour of Skinny's trial, brought nearer the zero hour when the second brigade would walk over the torn bodies of the first and try to take Mont Dur from the Germans. Who was the spy, anyhow?

He came to the wall behind which Skinny had hunted snails. Just then the moon was blotted out for an instant and Buff looked up in quick alarm. Again something flitted across the crescent. A siren shattered the silence. Another air raid!

Beyond the wall a flash light's beam darted through the tree-tops into the sky. This time it could not be Skinny. The real spy was at work!

The gate was shut. Buff heaved against the oaken timbers. Ten paces ahead along the wall a chestnut tree cast a shadow blacker than the surrounding darkness. Buff could just get a finger-hold there on the top of the wall.

With knees and hobnailed toes against the rough surface he drew himself up until he could lie flat on the wall and look down on the other side. It was pitch dark. To his straining senses came the bark of anti-aircraft guns, the drone of airplane motors, the *crump! crump!* of bursting shrapnel, and the chirp of a cricket. The heavy odors of honeysuckle and a steaming manure pile filled his nostrils.

Near the gate a flash light began to spell a message. Dot dash—dash dot dot—dot dot dot dash—then Buff lost track. He lifted his weight on his hands and drew up his knees for a spring into the garden. Then a thought hit him and he lay down again.

Some one had learned of a battle order and was signaling it to the German flyers. But which order? If the real one was being sent, it ought to be stopped. If the fake order, it would save the day to let Fritz have it. Buff decided to take a chance. He would let the spy send his message and then catch him and find out which was sent. Plans could be changed.

Dot dash dash—dot—dot dot dot—dash. A hundred yards away a white flash lighted the earth. Buff's lungs were jarred and his ears deafened by the crash of an airplane bomb. Three times more, while he clung to the trembling wall, big fan-tailed tanks of high explosive burst to rend earth and air.

Buff let his legs down on the inside of the wall and stood free without having made a sound. Thirty feet to his right was a gate where shortly a German spy would be trying to get out.

Buff edged toward it, one hand feeling along the wall, the other outstretched. Eyes and ears strained. Another step. A dry twig snapped under his weight and a light blinded him.

Buff dived in a football tackle for where the other man's knees ought to be, as a pistol barked in his face. The legs twisted out of his grasp. He had misjudged his tackle.

He was struggling to his feet when the light glared again in his eyes. Buff, on his knees, knocked the light aside and the beam flashed over leather puttees, a serge uniform, and the snarling face of Field Clerk Loveridge.

Just too late Buff saw the blow coming and threw up a futile arm as the heavy flash light crashed against his temple.

THE thing that was suffocating him, Buff discovered, was the soft earth of a flower bed. He wondered what he had drunk this time and why Skinny hadn't put him to bed like a good buddy. Then events came back with a rush and he sat up. The sound of the Fokker bombers was a distant hum. He lurched to his feet and found the gate, standing open. Loveridge was gone. Buff cursed himself for a bungling fool.

Night air fanned his throbbing head and cleared his brain. At least he knew who was the spy. Buff ran for division P. C., his hobnails striking fire on the cobblestones. Where the grounds of the *hôtel de ville* ran down to the main road an automobile starter whined and he made for the sound. As the car loomed before him, the motor coughed and took hold. It was the two-starred sedan of General Howard. In another step Buff was beside the car.

Behind the wheel was Loveridge!

Buff leaped to the running board. He had no plan. He knew only that the spy was getting away, and that he must be stopped. A fist landed full in Buff's mouth and for an instant he relaxed his hold. The road rose to meet him.

When he scrambled to his feet and wiped the dust from his eyes the sedan was a hundred yards away, gathering speed. Buff forced himself to think. Northward the road ran to the front; southward, to the base. The spy had taken the route toward the base.

But the road did not run straight south. Instead it wandered east along the river bank to an old stone bridge, crossed the stream and doubled back, forming a great letter U. If Buff could cross between the points of the U while the automobile was going around it, he might be in time to meet Loveridge again. It would be impossible unless something happened to delay the machine, but it was his only chance.

Between Buff and the river was a barbed-wire fence, and beyond that a plowed field. A barb caught in his breeches and he jerked free, ripping cloth and hide from hip to knee. His feet sank in the plowed ground and the furrows tripped him, but he stumbled on. Behind him was an uproar. Down the road he could hear the general's car, nearing the bridge.

The river at last. At its slimy green edge were flat rocks where French women pounded the laundry of American soldiers. Beyond were other rocks, and the river was low. In daylight one could cross by jumping from rock to rock. At night it was different. At the third jump Buff's hobnails skidded and he went in with a splash, getting a mouthful of water that he knew was full of typhoid. When he tried to walk, a stone rolled under his feet and the river closed over him. He had to swim.

Presently his thrashing feet struck bottom and he found that he could wade again. Precious seconds had been lost. Slipping and stumbling, he made the farther shore. The bank was steep, and it crumbled away under hands and feet. As he neared the top he heard the whistle of an American locomotive, the authoritative signal of a hospital train bound for the rear.

The train was at Buff's right. The sedan, thundering across the bridge, was to his left. A stone's throw straight ahead the track and road crossed. The spy was racing the train to the crossing. If he got there first he would escape. If the train delayed the spy just a moment, Buff knew he could get his hands on that automobile again.

He raced the automobile and train to the crossing. Then the train was pounding across and the screech of automobile brakes rose above the clatter of iron wheels.

The end of the train flashed by and the sedan slid forward just as Buff panted into the road. He caught the spare tire at the rear of the car and his feet were jerked from the ground. There was sharp pain as his shins struck metal, but he hung on.

THE sedan bounced over the track and around a curve. Buff braced his feet and took a new grip on the tire. Wind whistled through his soaked clothing and his teeth chattered. Now and then the general's car shot by a loaded truck grinding toward the front or ducked around an ambulance jolting to the rear. Curses flung by other drivers mingled with the exhaust.

There was a light ahead and the car was slowing down. In one photographic glance around the side of the sedan Buff saw a crossroads with a reconnaissance truck drawn up across their path. Of course word had been telephoned back from division P. C. to stop the two-starred sedan, and now a detail with this truck was prepared to do it. A reconnaissance truck, in addition to map making equipment, small arms, radio and a box of hand grenades, carries a movable searchlight and a machine gun.

The sedan ground almost to a stop, and the command "Halt!" rang from the truck. With a lurch that made Buff wrap his arms again around the spare tire, the car leaped under a full throttle and swerved sharply to the left. What a daredevil Loveridge was!

The sedan jumped a ditch and crashed through a fence. They were in an orchard, charging between trees with only centimeters to spare. Low limbs clawed at Buff and tore his clothes and skin. Another fence bowed and crashed, another ditch bounced under the wheels, and the machine was on the road again, tearing east at right angles to its former course.

The move took the truck crew by surprise, but in an instant their searchlight caught the lurching sedan. Bullets zoomed around Buff's ears. A machine gun hammered behind him and paint flew from the automobile body near his eyes where a row of holes appeared. The sedan swerved around a turn and the truck was blotted from view.

Risking everything for speed, Loveridge snapped on the lights of the car, and Buff could see the road stretching for a mile ahead without a turn. This would be the end, he decided. His arms and legs ached with the pounding of the road.

If he stayed on the back of the sedan he was going to be shot. Not much

doubt about that. What couldn't that machine gun do in a mile of straight-away? He wanted to drop off and crawl to the side of the road and just rest for hours and hours. After all, he was young and had a lot to live for. But if he quit now, the spy might escape. Buff gritted and hung on.

Bullets whined again, crashed into the car and kicked up dust in the road, If only they would hit a tire and make Loveridge stop, or, better, hit Loveridge. But Buff's own body was between the gun and Loveridge, shielding the spy. He drew in his neck and tried to take in as little space as possible.

For an instant the gun was silent—jammed, or a belt run out. A quarter of a mile to the next turn. Something more than a quarter of a minute. Then again bullets rained on the sedan. Hot steel seared Buff's shoulder and plowed a furrow in his scalp. He shut his eyes and waited.

Around the turn on two wheels skidded the sedan and a patch of woods hid the searchlight. Two more quick turns without sight of the pursuers. Another straight-away while Buff waited for the glare of a searchlight that did not come. The truck had been left behind.

THEIR course was taking them far to the east of the war. The road seemed deserted. Loveridge switched off the lights and the sedan became again just another army motor car. Two sleeping French villages flashed by like something out of a movie.

They were getting into second Army territory now, where tired divisions from the Argonne were sent to rest and the war was quieter. The second Army's front was thinly held. Fritz had plenty to do where the first army was hammering. Almost anywhere north of here a spy could get through to German territory.

As if in answer to this thought, the car swung north at the next cross-roads and headed toward the front. Just as Buff decided he must do something to stop the sedan, the motor missed, sputtered and died.

Buff let his feet to the ground and eased his cramped arms and legs. He heard the whine of the starter and one cough from the motor—no more. Then the left-hand door opened. Loveridge would be coming around to see what was the matter. Buff crouched in the shadow, eager for the shock of battle.

Dust muffled a footfall, a man's figure loomed in the moonlight and Buff sprang. This time luck was with him. He had time to leap just right. His left hand clamped around the field clerk's right wrist, behind the hand that gripped an army automatic. For the moment terms were even.

Loveridge was surprised and staggered but he kept his feet. With his free right hand, Buff lashed out for the other man's jaw. Loveridge evaded the blow and caught Buff's wrist. For a dozen heartbeats the two faced each other, foot to foot, eye to eye, each holding the other in the same grip.

Buff tried to force his opponent backward, snarling at the leer in the other's face. Each tested his strength against the other, and they stood immobile while muscles bulged, sweat stood out on foreheads made ugly by swelling veins. The only sound was their labored breathing.

Buff felt something sticky on his neck and side. The struggle had re-opened his clotted wounds. He exerted all his strength in a straining heave to force the spy to give ground. Love-

ridge stood firm and slowly bent Buff's body backward.

The field clerk was the stronger man. Buff had to step back or be bent double. Loveridge followed up the advantage. Buff sensed a rear fender of the automobile behind him and fought back. To be bent over that with no chance to give way would be fatal.

Buff tried to wrench his right arm free, but Loveridge's grip was like a plumber's vise. Buff felt himself weakening. Loss of blood had sapped his strength. A vision of Skinny, backed against a wall with his eyes bandaged, floated before him. It wasn't fair, the enemy's getting all the breaks; here he was, empty-handed, trying to fight fair with a man who had a pistol and was ready to use it.

IN a wave of fury, Buff lowered his head and butted, his frontal bone battering the field clerk across the nose and eyes. With both men's wrists locked, there was no defense for this attack, and Loveridge backed away. Buff threw one hobnailed shoe behind the leather puttees, jerked them toward him and thrust his head and shoulders forward. Both men crashed to the ground, Buff on top.

For a minute they wrestled, eyes and mouth full of dust, now one on top, now the other. Buff wrenched his right arm free and flailed at the other's face, but could not get in a telling blow. The field clerk struck back, his knuckles breaking the skin on Buff's face, but the sergeant-major was beyond feeling pain.

Buff knew the struggle could not last long. He was weakening fast and the field clerk seemed to be as strong as ever. Buff crooked his right arm around the other's throat, but it was thrown off. Then suddenly Loveridge's leather-clad legs gripped his body in a powerful scissors hold. The breath was being squeezed out of him. Lights danced before him and his enemy's fingers were in his face, groping gouging for his eyes.

In a last despairing effort, Buff added his free right hand to his left on the enemy's wrist, bent one knee as he lay on his back, pulled the field clerk's pistol arm across the knee and heaved with all the force he had left. He heard the bone snap like a stick.

The fight was over. Buff snatched the automatic out of the dust and lurched to his feet, reeling while his brain cleared and the breath came back to his burning lungs. His heart was pounding as if to crack his ribs. Loveridge sat swaying in the road, his left arm cuddling his broken right.

"Get up," ordered Buff, leveling the automatic. Loveridge obeyed, and Buff searched him quickly for other weapons. There were none. The sergeant-major found a straight stick at the side of the road and bound the broken arm to it with one of his own leggings. Then he turned to the sedan to see what had stopped it. There was a bullet hole near the bottom of the gasoline tank. Only the field clerk's furious speed had enabled him to drive so far before the fuel ran out.

"Tough luck," Buff told his prisoner. "It's a long way back to the P. C. and we gotta be there by 11 A.M. We'll hike till we get a lift.

"Detail, atten-n-n-shun! About face! Forwa-a-a-rd hup!"

BUFF halted the field clerk before the office of General Howard. A sentry at the door told him there was a trial going on and nobody could enter. A dusty courier with a message was waiting to get in.

Buff reflected. So far, all the army had on him was: desertion of his post of duty, absence without leave, direct disobedience of orders on two or three counts, disorderly conduct, and being out of uniform. He might as well make it really good.

He brushed the astonished sentry aside, pushed the door open, thrust his prisoner into the room, and followed. The courier edged in after him as if he had been waiting for this chance.

As all eyes turned upon him, Buff shifted the automatic from his right hand to his left, faced the general, clicked his heels and brought up a painful salute.

"Sir," he stated, "Sergeant-major Cody reports to the court with a German spy under arrest."

Consternation marked the faces of the officers as they took in the figure of the usually dapper sergeant-major. His cap was gone and he had only one legging. His head and face were stuccoed with blood and road dust. His uniform was shapeless, tattered and ground full of dirt, but his pose was that of West Point on parade.

The courier who had followed Buff into the room saw his chance to hand a message to a staff colonel, chief of division G-2, and duck out again. Skinny's face lighted up at Buff's entry.

There was dead silence for seven ticks of the clock, then the general recovered enough to snap off one brittle question:

"Who is this prisoner?"

"Field Clerk Loveridge, sir," Buff told him.

"By George, it's—" began G-2 and thumped the table.

The general froze him with a glance.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the colonel, "but will the general read this?"

The general did. It was the dispatch the courier had brought in. From it the commanding officer's chilling gaze turned on Buff's prisoner, and then swept the court.

"Gentlemen," the general announced, "this message from G-2 Army puts a new complexion on this case. A man found murdered and stripped a few days ago has been identified by finger-prints as Field Clerk Loveridge."

The icy gaze once more focused on the prisoner.

"Now *who*," said the general, "are *you*?"

SKINNY KRAUSE'S knobby fingers flew over the keyboard as he typed a battle order and handed it to the chief of staff. Colonel Trent scratched his signature, sealed the order and dashed out. Skinny turned his worshiping gaze on the bandaged sergeant-major.

"But, Buff," he pleaded, "who was he?"

"Just a German spy," Buff told him, "and a damn' nervy one. He killed a field clerk named Loveridge that was coming here under orders, and he took the dead man's clothes, dog tags, and travel orders. That's how everything checked and he could pass himself off as Field Clerk Loveridge, even if his uniform was too tight."

"Then he had it all fixed up with the Germans," Skinny decided, "so they'd come over in an air raid, drop some bombs to make it look natural, and he could flash messages to 'em and tell 'em what we were goin' to do, huh?"

"My boy," Buff beamed with pride, "you're getting almost intelligent. Yes, buddy, that's just what he did, signaling from some yard or pig-sty;

and that's why he planted you to look for *snails!* He figured that if anybody got caught it would be you. You poor damn' sap," and he mauled the thin corporal affectionately. "And then the second time, the cagy devil figured that garden was the last place anybody 'd look, after you'd been caught there."

Skinny's blue eyes clouded again. "Another thing I can't get straight," he said, "is how the Germans come to call off their army if they knew what we were goin' to do. Look at the old battle map now."

He pointed to the chart on the wall, where red and black pins marked the positions of the armies. The Mont Dur salient had been turned inside out, and what had been a German strong point holding up the American advance was now an American position dominating the plain.

Buff threw back his head and laughed. "Didn't I tell you about that? I wrote a fake order and burned it up, telling the Ninety-Ninth Division to move twenty kilometers west; and Fritz moved his army over there to meet us. That's how come the Ninety-Ninth gained ten kilometers in ten hours. There was nothing to stop 'em. Oh, boy! After this when anybody wants to know who won the war, you tell 'em, Skinny. I'm too modest."

"Just one thing more," Skinny wanted to know. "If this spy didn't hear these orders dictated and didn't even see a copy of 'em, and if you burned up the fake one you wrote, how in hell did he find out what they were?"

The sergeant-major lifted the ribbon spool from the corporal's typewriter, spun off a yard of the inked fabric and held it up to the light.

"Ain't it simple?" he said. "The spy was handy with a screwdriver, and he got himself a job keeping the typewriters in order. Then all he had to do was keep 'em supplied with new ribbons. See this? Here's the battle order you just finished. *The first thing that's written with a new typewriter ribbon can be read right off the ribbon.*

"Next time you write a secret order on a new ribbon, Skinny, just trip the reverse to run the ribbon through again, backwards, and write a letter to your girl or something. There might be another German around."

THE END.

The Curious Papaya Tree

IN the tropical regions of Mexico grows a tree called *papaya*, in Spanish, which bears a large edible orange-fleshed melon, but which is more remarkable for its extraordinary capacity for making tough meat tender than for the fruit it produces. Indians hang old fowls and tough pieces of beef overnight among the branches with the certainty that the meat will be tender and ready for cooking in the morning. Extremely tough meat is wrapped up in the leaves of this tree and left to stand for twenty-four hours, after which time it is in perfect condition for consumption.

Scientists explain that the leaves of this most peculiar tree contain a high proportion of pepsin which explains clearly its strange ability to make tough meats tender. The *papaya* or "pawpaw," is also found in Florida.

Gerald FitzGerald.

"No, thanks, Mr. Jones, I'm walking with my new boy-friend"

The Radio Gun-Runners

Divided among themselves, a motley crew of yachtsmen and filibusters meet weird perils among the prehistoric monsters and Viking warriors that inhabit the world inside our hollow Earth

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Flyers," "The Radio Planet," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

CRUISING in his seventy-five foot yacht Miami, off northern Newfoundland, young Tom Jones is hijacked by gangsters, whose boat, engaged in gun-running from Canada to Central America, was sinking. Scarface Boston Jimmy, chief of the gunrunners, takes command of the Miami, which is driven northward by terrific storms, and finally is caught in the polar ice.

An opening in the ice, leading northward, leads them over the edge of the world, and they find that the story of the Radio Flyers, who claimed there is no north pole, was true. Instead, there is a huge opening, over whose rim the sea flows into the inside of the earth, which is a hollow shell with a small central sun. Here the explorers find the land where the Radio Flyers, Angus Selkirk and Eric Redmond, had

This story began in the Argosy for February 22.

joined the descendants of the lost Vikings in their war against the Eskimo-like natives, or Skraelings.

Scarface, a racketeer whose wide reading and great ambition makes him want to emulate Cæsar and Napoleon, lands to take possession of this country in his own name.

His lieutenant, Nick Fratelli, steals the boat and leaves Scarface, Jones, the radio operator Little Arty, and the ex-policeman Mike Murphy, marooned ashore. They investigate the plateau on which is a Viking city, but cannot get through the secret tunnel; and they are suddenly attacked by a huge woolly red elephant—a mammoth.

Meantime Terry, fleeing from Nick the Rat's advances, escapes to shore, and is picked up by a band of Vikings.

Nick and his men, planning to join the Skraelings and make war upon the Vikings, land. They hastily duck for cover and prepare an ambush as they see a group of the Norsemen coming.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE VIKING TRAIL.

THERE were five of the Vikings. As they came into sight along the path, Nick the Rat whispered to his gang, who lay, with rifles ready, concealed behind a clump of bushes: "When I say the word, give 'em the works."

"I tank—" began Swede.

"Fire!" shouted Nick, and out blazed five rifles.

Two Vikings fell. The three others stood irresolute for a moment. Then, hurling their spears before them, they rushed full at the bush. Once more the rifles blazed, and then the gangsters leaped to their feet and met drawn swords with the roar of automatics.

It was all over in an instant. The five Vikings lay on the ground, four of them motionless, the fifth propped up on one elbow, with his other hand to his chest, coughing.

Scutari had fallen flat on his back, with a spear through his heart. Nick Fratelli's right forearm was pinned to his side with a slender Viking sword which he was frantically trying to push out with his left hand. Cicero, torn and bleeding about one shoulder, had dropped his automatic, and was leaning against a tree, feeling of the injured part. Friday, the Eskimo, had fled.

Swede Johnson stood over the dying Viking. The latter coughed and murmured something. Swede bent low to catch the words, then straightened up.

"The curse of Thor!" he muttered in sudden superstitious horror.

The Viking coughed once more, transfixed Cicero with a baleful glance and dropped prone on the grass.

"I tank—" began Swede, but Nick interrupted him:

"Can the chatter, and pull out this butcher knife. Easy now," as Swede obliged him.

The hole in Nick's side turned out to be merely a flesh-wound, but the blade had penetrated his forearm right between the two bones.

As Swede dexterously tore off a part of Nick's shirt and bandaged the arm, the wounded man growled: "The nerve of those squareheads, fighting against all our guns."

"Dey vere Vikings!" asserted Swede proudly.

Friday reappeared, and was given quite a dressing-down by Fratelli in the Eskimo's guttural tongue. Then the four took Scutari's rifle, pistol, food and ammunition, and the helmets,

swords, bucklers and other trappings of the dead enemy. Fratelli helped himself to a purple cloak which struck his fancy; Cicero took a jeweled dagger, marked with a jade swastika.

Laden with booty, the four started back down the trail, leaving the bodies of the five Vikings and Scutari, with perfect unconcern, to rot beneath the sweltering beams of the central sun.

"I tank—" began Swede.

"You think too much," interrupted Nick Fratelli testily. "What *I* think is that we better not get within reach of any more Vikings if we can help it. Come on, you guys, or we'll be in a jam."

ABOUT the time when Nick and his gang had started out on the exploring trip, Scarface and his party began their circuit of the plateau, which was to end in their utter rout by a woolly mammoth, which had run Scarface himself up a tree.

The beast had then continued to bunt at the tree, until the tree leaned at such an angle that the brute's head could no longer secure a purchase against the slanting bark.

Thereat the elephant changed its tactics. Going to the other side of the tree, the beast stood beneath the man, and, applying its trunk to the tree trunk, began pulling downward with all its strength. The tree, already very much loosened at the roots, could not long withstand the weight of such a huge animal.

But Scarface, coolly leaning down until his arm was within reach of the beast's trunk if it had seen fit to release its hold on the tree, blazed away all seven shots of his automatic, square at the center of the high flat forehead, which now constituted such a point-blank target.

Stunned, the mammoth recoiled on its haunches for an instant; then flung itself at the tree in a frenzy of rage. The shots must have missed the brain, which in these prehistoric elephants occupied but a very small part of the massive skull.

The tree was now swaying like a reed, but Scarface calmly inserted another clip, steadied himself with his left hand, and blazed away again, this time at the two little red eyes of hate that glared up at him.

Again the impact of the forty-fives stunned the beast and forced it back upon its haunches. And again it returned to its onslaught against the tree. But this time, totally blinded, it missed the tree completely, and went dashing off across the plain.

Dropping with a grunt of relief from the well-nigh horizontal tree, Scarface unslung his rifle, knelt, and discharged all five shots of his magazine at the departing animal; but, unaffected by his shots, it disappeared into the woods which lined the plain.

Scarface, exasperated, brushed off his soiled and disarranged yachting costume, as Mike Murphy, Tom Jones and Little Arty dropped one by one from neighboring trees.

From the air above them rang out a silvery laugh. All four looked up. Over the edge of the cliff-top, they saw a face, at each side of which an ash-blond braid hung down over the rocks.

Scarface doffed his hat, and blew a kiss to the lady from his finger-tips. The face promptly disappeared.

"It's hard to tell at this distance, but I think she's a pippin," remarked Little Arty.

"I believe that that must be the Swede girl that I've always dreamed of meeting some day," announced the handsome young gang leader.

"Good luck to you, Romeo," chimed in Tom Jones.

"That's all very well," said Murphy, "but how do we get up there, anyhow?"

"We holler, I guess," replied Scarface, and suited the action to the word.

But the cliffs above might just as well have been barren, uninhabited rocks for all the effect that their shouting developed, then or later. They separated to circle the plateau.

THEY met again, two meals later, at their starting point, without any of them being able to report any progress. Accordingly they withdrew for another "night" of turns at watching and sleeping.

Finally rested, they ate breakfast—the last that was left of their compressed rations—and then decided that some change of tactics was imperative if they would rescue Terry. So they set out to the southward along the trail which they had seen taken by the Vikings who had left the plateau two days ago. In this way they hoped either to reach wherever the Vikings might be bound, or to meet them coming back.

The trail led sometimes through tangled forests and sometimes through open plains. The central sun beat pitilessly down, and aloft in the heavy air circled one huge and solitary leather-winged *skwaa*, in search of carrion. After several hours, hunger began to gnaw at them, and the circling *skwaa* took on a menacing aspect.

A bit further on, a long-legged rabbitlike creature suddenly appeared in the trail ahead of them. All four rifles blazed simultaneously, and the little creature fell.

"Bedad, we eat!" exclaimed Murphy.

"Let's carry it till we come to water," suggested Tom.

They had not gone far, when they came to a grove of gigantic orange-trees beside a little river which crossed their path at right angles. There they halted and built a fire, and soon the little animal, skinned, dressed, and spitted, was sizzling savorily over the crackling flames.

After the meat, they peeled and divided one monster orange, and reclined, their backs against trees, eating the segments as though they had been huge slices of watermelon.

A cool breeze blew through the little grove. The brook tinkled merrily over its pebbles. The moss which covered the ground beneath the trees was thick and comfortable. Large green and blue and silver butterflies fluttered lazily about in the shafts of crimson sunlight that fell through the openings in the leafy canopy. The four men were replete, and would have been completely at peace with the world, if it had not been for their thoughts of little Terry.

But their rifles lay handy, Scarface's across his knees, for they hadn't yet forgotten the elephant episode.

"Not a bad meal at all," mused their dark curly-haired leader, rising to his feet. "There is not an eating-joint in the States could beat it."

"*Staap!*" came a challenging shout from across the stream.

Murphy leaped erect. Tom and Little Arty rushed back for their rifles. On the other bank of the stream stood two Vikings, with weapons alert.

NOW that the first moment of surprise was over, Scarface threw his rifle into the crotch of his left elbow, where it was handy, but not threatening and holding his right hand

aloft in what he had read somewhere was a gesture of friendship, he said: "We've been looking for you—"

"*Yee forstaar ikka,*" replied one of the Norsemen.

"I guess you're right," agreed Jimmy, advancing with his friendliest smile. "Now the idea is—"

But the Vikings motioned him back and brandished their spears menacingly. Jimmy halted and frowned, then held up his rifle and pointed to it. He could be threatening, too, if the occasion demanded. How absurd they were, these men out of the past, to dare to match their puny spears and swords against Springfield rifles and Colt automatics! Well, they ought to know what firearms were, from their experience with Eric and Angus.

This gave him an idea.

"Eric Redmond. Angus Selkirk," he pronounced clearly and distinctly.

"*Yah! Yah!*" replied the Norsemen, their expressions indicating that they now realized that these four strangers were compatriots of the two young Americans which he had named.

Jimmy's three henchmen now stood at his side. And more Vikings had joined those on the opposite bank of the stream. But still both parties hesitated to make further overtures.

At this moment a glad girlish cry broke from the thicket behind the Vikings.

"Yoo-hoo, Mr. Jimmy," she cried. "Gee, but I'm glad to see you again."

And Theresa Ferreira bounded onto the scene.

With this introduction, the Vikings signalled to the Americans that they might cross, and soon Theresa was delightedly hugging her former comrades, much to their present embarrassment.

"Terry!" exclaimed Tom fervently. "Where did you come from? And how do you happen to know these men?" inquired Scarface.

"It's a long story. I ducked out from the wop, and these squareheads picked me up," said the girl. "Tell you all about it in a minute."

Then the Vikings warmly shook hands with the four Americans.

"Isn't this better, Scarface," asked Tom, when they secured a moment's breathing space, "than to shoot down these fine fellows and try to steal their country away from them?"

But Scarface Boston Jimmy reserved his opinion on that subject. In spite of his reading and the superficial culture that had won him the half derisive, half respectful title of "Boston" Jimmy, he was at heart a Chicago gangster.

Suddenly Terry looked around her with puzzled bewilderment.

"But where's father?" she asked.

"You poor child," replied Scarface, putting his arm protectingly across her shoulders. "Your father is dead. He was shot in the fight for the Miami."

Theresa burst into tears.

"The thing to do," suggested Scarface gently, "is to get your friends to back-trail and help me recover possession of our boat."

"Yeah?" said she, smiling through her tears. "But how are we going to tell it to them? Can any of you talk Viking?"

CHAPTER X.

GUESTS OR PRISONERS?

IT was, indeed, a task for superhuman ingenuity to attempt to explain to the Norse warriors that there was a gasoline yacht somewhere to the southward, and that repossession of that

boat was of vital importance. You can't make gestures indicative of a motor boat; and to say "*Phut-phut-phut!*" means nothing to a person who has never heard a motor.

After scratching his head for a few minutes in perplexity, Scarface Jimmy took a piece of dead wood, and whittled out a rough model of a canoe, while the Vikings suppressed their impatience at his apparently childish occupation, and maintained a polite semblance of interest.

Placing the completed craft in the water of the little brook, "Boat," said he.

"*Yah, boat,*" replied the young leader of the warriors. Evidently the Norse word was very much like the English, though the sound was very much flatter.

Meanwhile, under Jimmy's direction, the others of his party had been carving little wooden figures of men. These were now placed in the boat.

"Men in boat," explained the gangster. Then, pointing first to himself and then to the southward, he said, "My boat."

Walking with exaggerated steps to the south, he p i c k e d up the boat, hugged it to his breast, and then walked north again.

"Gee, Mr. Jimmy," exclaimed Theresa, laughing in spite of her grief, "they'll think you mean you want to go somewhere, and get some toy boats and wooden dolls to play with."

Arty snickered audibly. Murphy grinned. But Tom Jones and Scarface were deadly serious. However, the blond youth in the chain mail seemed to catch on—after a fashion.

Holding up one finger, he pointed to the toy boat and to the south. Then holding up one, two, three, four, all fingers, and opening and closing his hand several times, he pointed to the north, beckoned the others to follow him, and resumed the march.

His meaning was obvious: if his guest wanted a canoe, there were plenty to be had at the plateau city; come on! And he strode off to the northward.

"I guess we'll have to wait till we get to the plateau," asserted Tom Jones. "Let's hope one of the two Milwaukee aviators is there to interpret for us. Terry, will you walk with me?"

The girl tossed her head, and replied saucily, "Thanks a lot, Mr. Jones, but I'm walking with my new boy friend here."

And she ranged herself alongside the mail-clad warrior.

Tom Jones's views on the subject of Vikings underwent a sudden change. Heretofore they had seemed to him to be splendid heroic creatures out of the romantic past. Now they suddenly became crude, rough and untutored savages in his eyes. They really did not "belong." To a Harvard man, this was final!

Dropping back in the line of march to a position beside Scarface Boston Jimmy, he said, "You know, chief, you may be right in your plans to fight these fellows. There may be a chance yet."

Scarface looked long and penetratingly at his y o u n g protégé, then glanced ahead at Theresa swinging happily along at the side of the Viking leader, whose hand rested protectingly on her elbow. The gangster smiled understandingly, but said nothing.

THEIR next meal was long overdue ere they reached the plateau, and clambered up, one after the other, through the chimneylike entrance. Their approach must have been

noted, for the stone slab had been removed from the top, and a group of tall blond men and women were awaiting them there.

An explanation, in an unknown tongue, ensued among the Vikings, with much pointing at their five guests —or prisoners.

Then one of the Vikings ordered, "*Komm!*"

Something in the way in which this man included her with her four male companions caused Theresa to realize suddenly that these Vikings all regarded her as a little boy. And why not, when it had taken the gangsters so long to discover the secret of her true sex!

This put an entirely different light on the interest which the young chieftain in chain mail had shown in her. He had just been big-brotherly, that was all. The idea!

Theresa promptly determined to right the matter at once. Walking over to a group of women, she pointed to herself and then to them. But they misunderstood her and shooed her away. Then she made a motion with both hands around her legs to indicate a skirt, pretended to do up her closely-cropped hair in a pug, and pointed to herself.

Her four fellow-countrymen nodded their heads vigorously and waved her away. This time the women got the idea, and led Theresa off with them, while the men led Scarface, Tom, Mike and Arty away to a house, where they were fed, and given blankets and wooden benches to sleep on.

This did not at all suit Scarface. The lack of communication between him and his hosts—or captors—was getting on his nerves, as was the delay in taking steps to recover possession of the Miami, and to thwart whatever diabolical plans Nick the Rat might have in mind. The fact that, as soon as Scarface regained the gasoline-yacht, his own plans might become just as diabolical as Nick's, did not seem to him to be in the least inconsistent.

"Say, don't any of you speak English?" he asked. "I want to see Angus Selkirk or Eric Redmond at once! Do you get me? Angus Selkirk! Eric Redmond! At once! Now! Immediately! *Pronto!* What's the Swede for 'quick'?"

"*Yah, yah, yarl, imorgen,*" replied one of the Vikings.

"Sounds to me for all the world like a college yell," Scarface remarked to Tom. "Say, you're a college man. What do you make out of it?"

"Well," replied Jones dubiously, "'*Yah*' means 'yes,' and '*yarl*' means 'earl,' the title held by Eric and Angus. So the other funny word must mean when they are going to let us see one of them. Sounded like *Morgen*, the German for 'to-morrow.' I guess we'll just have to wait until that time comes, whenever it is."

"Then let's turn in," said Scarface, resignedly.

"I wish they was a radio here," grumbled Little Arty.

"I believe this is a jail," asserted Mike Murphy. "That bird you were just talking to is the spitting image of one of the deputy sheriffs of Suffolk County."

THE next morning they were ushered out of the building. Theresa was waiting outside, with several of the Viking women. But such a different Theresa! Gone was her natty sailor costume, and in its place she wore the same sort of clothing as the women about her. Her boyish bob didn't quite fit; but, for all that, she

looked very regal for such an impudent little sprite.

"Gee, Mr. Jimmy," she greeted them, "will you look at the clothes! These ladies took away all my own things, so I had to put on these. Do they look awful?"

"Not at all bad," admired Tom earnestly.

But she ignored him with a toss of her head, and continued, "You know those kind of things you clean sinks with? Made up of lots of little iron rings hitched together?"

"I never cleaned any sinks," replied Scarface, amused but a bit puzzled as to the point of her remarks, "but I think I know what you mean."

"Well you know that boy, who had the shirt made out of that same kind of stuff? The boy I walked with?"

Tom Jones scowled unhappily.

Terry went on, "Well, I saw him again this morning, and him and me got along fine. We couldn't talk much, but I told him my name was Theresa Ferreira, and then he pointed to himself and said, 'Nils Uppri.'"

"What?" gasped Scarface and Tom in unison.

"Say that again," Tom demanded.

"Nils Uppri," she repeated. "What of it? Ain't that a nice enough name?"

"Sure it's a nice enough name," replied Scarface, "only it happens to be the name of the bishop of all this country. Nils Uppri! What do you know about that!"

It was now Terry's turn to be surprised.

"A bishop!" she exclaimed, her lip curling scornfully. "The dirty pup! A priest, making up to a poor girl like me. He'd oughta known better. I ask you, Mr. Murphy, is it right?"

"It sure don't sound right to me," asserted the Irishman, shaking his head. Then brightening, "But perhaps he's an Episcopal bishop. Sure, that would be a fine match for ye, Terry."

"No such thing," asserted Tom. "It's a dirty trick for him to—"

"You're all wrong!" explained Scarface Jimmy. "Bishops in this country are like kings. The title descends from father to son. Nils Uppri is Bishop, merely because his father, Thorvald Uppri, was the Bishop. And so on, clear back to Eric Uppri, first Christian Bishop of Greenland."

"I don't care what they're like," stated Theresa, pouting, "Bishops oughtn't to marry, and that's all there is to it."

"Did he ask you to marry him?" asked Scarface in surprise.

"No, he didn't. That is— Oh, I don't know what you're talking about. I think you're perfectly horrid." And Theresa blushed violently.

"Gee!" whistled Little Arty expressively.

"You shut up!" snapped Tom, to Arty's great astonishment.

Just then one of the Vikings relieved the situation by saying, "*Komm!*"

As they followed him, the girl remarked, half to herself, "Perhaps he isn't a bishop, after all."

THEY were led to a large building, which seemed to be a sort of assembly hall. In it, benches were arranged as in a church, and these were occupied by groups of warriors chatting together in a low tone of voice. At the end where the pulpit should have been, there was a long carved wooden table, with several high-backed chairs behind it.

The center chair, with the highest back, was occupied by a tall broad-shouldered Viking, with sandy locks and a massive red beard. On his right

sat the young leader of the expedition which had brought them hither. The other chairs were vacant.

Scarface, Theresa, Tom, Mike and Arty were led down the aisle to a position facing the Vikings seated at the table. As their conductor bowed low before these Vikings, the Americans did likewise; but there was something unconsciously regal in the courteous bow of Scarface.

The red-bearded Viking, his poker-face inscrutable, studied each of them in turn with his gray-blue eyes.

Then said he, in excellent English, "Who are you and what are you doing in our country?"

Was it possible that this dignified and authoritative Norse warrior could be one of the two young Milwaukee aviators, Eric and Angus? It seemed hardly likely. And yet could they, in so short a time, have taught such perfect English to one of the Vikings? That was equally unlikely.

"And whom have we the honor of addressing?" replied Scarface.

The Viking frowned as he said, "A bad beginning, my friend. But I will tell you. I am Angus Selkirk, formerly of Milwaukee, and now a *yarl* among these Greenlanders. And you?"

Scarface assumed his most disarming and engaging smile.

"We are honored," said he. "For three days we have been trying to get in touch with either you or Eric Redmond on a matter of vital importance to us all. My name is James Lefavour of Chicago. May I present Miss Theresa Ferreira of Edgartown, Mass.; Mr. Thomas Jones, Harvard, 1929; Sergeant Michael J. Murphy, formerly of the Cambridge police; and Mr. Arthur Doe of Chicago."

"And the important matter?" prompted Selkirk, unimpressed.

"We came to your country in a seventy-five-foot motor yacht, after being blown into the polar ice in a storm," continued Scarface. "There has been mutiny aboard our ship, and fighting between the two factions, each losing one man. At present the ship is in the hands of a thoroughgoing scoundrel, named Nick Fratelli, with four other thugs" (Scarface did not yet know of the death of Scutari) "and one Chinaman. They have practically all the arms and ammunition, including two machine guns."

"Hm," ruminated the Scot. "And how did ye happen to be associating with such rascals?"

CHAPTER XI.

DEFIANCE.

LITTLE ARTY snickered. The question was, indeed, a poser. But Scarface met it squarely.

Said he, "I am a former Chicago bootlegger, better known as Scarface Boston Jimmy. You may have read about me in the Milwaukee papers, before you came down to this country."

Angus nodded, but did not change expression.

Jimmy continued, "I had read about you in the ARGOSY. So when I found myself blown through the polar opening, I headed for your city, bent on conquest. Frankly, I planned to make myself king, or emperor, or bishop, or whatever you call it, over your Vikings. But I couldn't control my own men, so here I am. I am not asking any favors. I have come to offer cooperation in recapturing the boat; and I never double cross. However much I may be personally to blame for turning this menace loose on you, the fact remains that the menace exists and must

be met at once, or Nick the Rat will succeed in conquering you as I had meant to do."

"Your frankness does you credit," replied Angus Selkirk grimly, "but why should I temporize with such a scoundrel as you admit yourself to be? Why not put you and your three gangsters here to death, and then go after the rest of your gang and boat?"

"You can't do it!" announced Scarface, unperturbed.

"Can't put you to death?" sneered Angus. "Don't you realize that it is a *yarl* of the Vikings that you are addressing? I have power of life and death over all prisoners."

"I wasn't talking about your killing me," retorted their prisoner. "Go ahead and do it, if you're that foolish. I meant you can't buck Nick Fratelli and the machine guns. And as for your being an earl, that doesn't impress me in the least. Come down off your high horse. You're nothing but a young Milwaukee newspaper reporter, off on a lark; and you know it, if you'll only stop and think for a moment."

"Enough!" thundered Angus, rising to his feet and drawing his sword.

But Scarface held up his hand in protest.

"Just a moment," said he. "There's no use in getting excited, just because I tell you a few plain facts. You need me worse than I need you, and I'm here to bargain with you, not to listen to threats. What do you suppose I surrendered to your gang for, if not to help you? No one was after me."

Angus sank back in his seat, amazement taking the place of his wrath.

"Well, of all the colossal nerve!" he exclaimed. "You are dragged before me, unarmed and a prisoner, and then you try to tell me where I get off! All right, proceed. Tell me."

"Now you're talking!" replied Scarface. "I thought you'd listen to reason. The situation is simply this: I know the Miami, and her equipment, and the personality of every one of her scoundrelly crew. They have a hundred rifles aboard. Two machine guns. Ample ammunition. They can clean your whole Viking civilization off the map. They have no morals, and no scruples."

"Have you?" interjected Angus pointedly.

"We'll let that wisecrack pass," returned Scarface suavely. "The point is that I understand the enemy, and will know when and where to find their weak spots. Tom Jones here is a scientific expert, who will be a valuable asset to your civilization. Little Arty is a radio hound, who may come in handy at any moment. And Mike Murphy is a scrapping Irish policeman, totally without fear. We offer you our services."

"And the price?" inquired Angus, who had by now completely recovered his composure. "That is, I assume you are demanding your freedom as the price."

"Our freedom?" laughed the gangster. "If that was all we wanted, why did we give ourselves up, in the first place? I demand an earldom for myself, and lands and some sort of rank for each of my three loyal men."

"I RATHER like you," replied the red-bearded *yarl*, ruminatively. "You've got such a colossal nerve! A prisoner, not begging some slight favor in return for his services, but rather demanding a yarldom. This is rich! And the joke is that you'll probably succeed in bluffing us into giving it to you. For the present you may consider yourself on probation. You

may dismiss your followers and discuss details with Bishop Uppri and ourself."

"Gee, Mr. Yarl," interjected Theresa, "is that boy a real bishop?"

"Yes, madam," replied Selkirk.

"Then will you please tell him in Swedish for me that I've got a new boy-friend?" said she, and walking over to Tom Jones she placed her hand confidingly in his arm.

Tom squared his shoulders and glowered belligerently at Nils Uppri. The latter needed no translation of the message. Although he couldn't fathom the reason, he sensed the purport from Theresa's action. So he smiled sadly down on her and shook his head.

Then Tom, Theresa, Mike, and Arty withdrew. The *yarl* motioned Scarface to a seat at the council table, and the two, with the young bishop, engaged in a discussion of terms and plans.

With continued frankness, the gangster sketched for them the entire story of his adventures. From time to time, Angus translated to Nils.

Finally Scarface concluded with: "Any questions?"

"Yes," replied Nils Uppri through his interpreter, "Why does not the girl like me any more?"

Angus burst into brief laughter. Then in translating this to the gangster, he added, "I think that I can answer that question myself. In our America, Mr. Lefavour, as you know, a Catholic bishop is a priest, and priests are celibates. Is that it?"

"That's the way I size it up," agreed Scarface.

"Well, it's perfectly preposterous! For a person of Nils Uppri's high station to consider that little gutter-cat."

"I don't know," ruminated the gangster, "'A cat may look at a king,' so why not at a Viking bishop? But, seriously speaking, I saw the boy's face—his reverence's face, I mean, or whatever you call him—when you gave him her message, and it certainly showed some concern. Also, his first question after I told my story just now, about the girl, rather than about the menace which threatens his people. Don't be too hasty, Mr. Selkirk; he seems pretty much of a love-struck lad."

Which comment Angus did not include in his translation to Nils.

THEN the discussion reverted to the problem as to what were Fratelli's probable plans, and as to where he was likely to strike first. So intently were they weighing every possibility, that they did not notice the lady who came and stood beside them.

Presently she spoke in soft Norse, "Angus, dear, we have just heard from Helga on the air. She is setting out at once to visit us, taking advantage of a supply-ship which happens to be sailing to-day."

The three men looked up. Jimmy's scar flared red for an instant, for this was the beautiful girl who had smiled down at him from the plateau, just after he had driven off the mammoth. But Angus too was looking at her, and so did not see the gangster's confusion. Jimmy had not understood her words, but something in her tone of voice in addressing Angus, warned Jimmy to school his features; so that, when Angus turned toward him, his face was again expressionless.

"My dear," said the Scot in Norse, "May I present a fellow-countryman of mine, Mr. Lefavour." Then in English, "Mr. Lefavour, this is my wife, Astrid.

"Please excuse her intrusion. She

came to tell me that her sister, Helga—Mrs. Eric Redmond, you know—is about to come here from our southern city on a visit."

As she turned and faced the gangster, a violent red flush mantled her features, for she recognized the man at whom she had smiled a few days ago. But her husband was facing the gangster, and so did not notice her blush. It was all that Scarface could do to maintain his composure under Angus's scrutiny.

So this girl, with whom he had flirted, was another man's wife! Was, in fact the wife of the most powerful man in this community, the man whose good will it was most essential for him to win. Well, if fate should ever give him back his gang, and his ship, and his guns and ammunition the fact that she was another man's wife, or whose wife she was, might not make so much difference after all! While there's life, there's hope.

He would be careful what he promised Selkirk, now. For the present, the important thing was to distract Angus Selkirk's attention, before he noticed their confusion.

So said Scarface, "Suppose the ship, which carries Mrs. Redmond, should run afoul of Nick the Rat in the Miami. What then?"

"Hell's delight!" exclaimed the *yarl*. "We must get her on the air and call the trip off. Come on."

He gathered up his gown and hurried not very dignifiedly from the hall. Astrid and Scarface followed him, side by side, tense and self-conscious, while Nils Uppri, the boy bishop, brought up the rear.

Angus led the way to his castle, one of the more pretentious of the dwellings of the little community, a rude structure of hand-hewn timber and hand-fitted stone, furnished inside with a queer mixture of barbaric Norse splendor, Scotch simplicity, and Yankee ingenuity. The American note was distinctly predominant.

In the main hall, or living-room, was the radio set which had formerly graced the polar airplane of the two Milwaukee explorers. The generator, which formerly had been run by the motor of the plane, was now operated by a series of wooden wheels and leather belts, manipulated by one of the *yarl's* Skraeling slaves.

Immediately on their arrival the slave was called, and the machinery was started turning. But for some reason, the apparatus failed to send.

Angus frantically tested here and there with voltmeter and ammeter, plied with pliers, and screwed with screwdriver; but still the thing wouldn't work.

THE incongruity of an ancient Viking nobleman, in the Milwaukee type living-room of a barbaric castle, broadcasting in the Norse language into a radio set powered by crude wooden wheels and a Skraeling slave, in the presence of a Viking princess, the Bishop of Greenland, and a Chicago gangster, was not lost on Scarface.

He grinned broadly, in spite of the seriousness of the situation, as he offered the services of Tom and Arty. Angus said a few words in Norse to Astrid, who promptly left the room, to have the men summoned. A few minutes later she returned, and a younger girl with her, their arms twined together. Except for age, they were as alike as two peas.

Scarface gasped. He had thought Astrid beautiful, but this new girl was

even more lovely, and with greater youth. The girl smiled shyly, almost roguishly at him, as though she knew some secret joke about him. Scarface smiled back. He was naturally a prepossessing young man, and looked well in his natty yachting costume.

"Lefavour—Borghild," introduced Astrid, with a quaint intonation.

"Oh, yes," chimed in Angus, looking up from his machinery, "Mr. Lefavour, this is my wife's cousin, Borghild Hoglund. I guess Astrid has already told Borghild about you."

And he resumed his work.

An awkward pause ensued, not broken until the arrival of Tom Jones and Little Arty. Tom glowered at the bishop. Then he and Arty fell to work on the radio.

In a short time the latter had spotted the trouble, and had repaired it. The generator again began to hum, and Angus called for his friend Eric's station in the southern city, while Nils, Astrid, Tom and Arty crowded around the set, and Scarface and Borghild smiled silently at each other.

But, at that moment in the southern city, Yarl Eric Redmond was down at the wharf seeing his wife off on her trip north, and so his station did not answer. The warning to Helga, to beware of Nick Fratelli, could not be delivered.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FATAL WARNING.

BY the time Angus Selkirk had learned of the danger that Helga Redmond might fall into the clutches of Nick Fratelli and his crew of cutthroats, those gentlemen had returned to the Miami, burdened down with their spoils, and dog-weary from their long trek under the hot central sun.

Charley Loy was unshackled and sent to the galley, while Nick called a conference.

"We've gotta find them Skraelings," asserted Fratelli. "This time I'm going to send Friday alone. If we all go, we'll get into a fight with them, just like we did with the Vikings."

So he conferred lengthily with the Eskimo, and put him ashore fully armed and provisioned. To guard against attack, they anchored the Miami a short way out into the water. Then they sat down to await Friday's return.

"See if you can't tune in something." suggested Fratelli.

Cicero tried time and again, at Nick's command. Finally, after dinner, he caught a fragmentary word. Juggling the dials in hit-and-miss fashion, he finally got the station again. It was a man's voice, broadcasting in a strange language.

Swede pricked up his ears.

"*Svenska*," he announced.

Instantly their saturnine chief became interested.

"Swedish, eh? What are they saying?" Nick asked eagerly.

So Swede translated as well as he could, although some of the words were new to him. Angus had at last got the southern city on the air, and some Viking of the south was now explaining to him that Eric was down at the wharf seeing Helga off.

When the fellow finally summoned Eric to the machine, the conversation continued, with appropriate pauses in which to switch over from sending to receiving, and vice versa, and to stop and start the generator-sets, for they had reverted to this method, as being

simpler than the two-wave-length simultaneous sending and receiving formerly employed by them.

The eavesdropping gangsters on the Miami learned that Eric's wife had already gone before the warning arrived, and they heard the horrified *yarls* describing the Miami's crew in most uncomplimentary terms, as Eric prepared to send a fast ship post-haste in a desperate attempt to head off Helga's swift vessel.

Nick gave his subordinates a triumphant grimace. "Right into our hands!"

WHEN the two *yarls* had signed off, Nick remarked: "Now we know as much about them as they do themselves, and they don't know a thing about us. I'll get that little Terry yet. And you and Swede and Friday, and even the Chink, can have your pick of the squarehead women. What was it that Napoleon said under similar circumstances?"

"Now, now, chief," remonstrated Cicero. "Don't get talking and acting like Scarface. There's only one of that sort, thank God."

Fratelli glowered, but did not attempt to perpetrate any more highbrow language.

They were sleeping for the second time since Friday's departure when they were aroused by a commotion on shore. Nick Fratelli looked out of his porthole.

On the beach there stood about twenty savages, and in their midst was the Eskimo, his hands tied behind him, his feet hobbled, and a halter around his neck.

Hastily dressing, Nick, Cicero, and Swede rushed on deck, fully armed. Charley Loy remained discreetly out of sight.

"What's the trouble?" shouted Fratelli, in Eskimo language.

"These very bad men," replied Friday, "they not believe me."

"Tell them I want to speak to Altoonah, their chief," thundered Fratelli. "Where is he?"

A straight-featured young native, wearing a Viking helmet and a shirt of chain-mail, but supported by crude crutches, hobbled painfully forward.

"I am Altoonah," said he in Norse. "What of it?"

Swede translated to Nick.

"Speak Innuit!" ordered the latter, adding to himself: "It's Altoonah, all right, for the story says he was crippled."

"I am Altoonah," repeated the native chieftain, this time in the native language. "What of it?"

"I seek your alliance to fight the Vikings," replied the gangster. "Did not my man Friday give you that message?"

"He did, but we did not believe him. You are the same race as Eric and the elephant-faced one. You ought to be on their side. So we do not believe you. It is a trap."

"It is *not* a trap!" boomed Nick. "Positively not."

"What is your grievance against the Vikings?" asked Altoonah.

"None," answered Fratelli. "We seek conquest."

"Ho! I begin to believe you," said the Skraeling. "If you were lying, you would have invented some grievance. Then what will you offer for our help? For we, too, have no grievance against the Vikings. And *we* desire no conquest."

Of course, the conversation did not go quite so smoothly as this, for Nick Fratelli was new at the Eskimo lan-

guage, and some of the Skraeling words differed from those which he had learned from Friday, but the foregoing was the substance of what was said.

"How about Helga Uppri?" asked the gangster, pausing to let his words sink in. He had read of Altoonah's vain attempts to win the girl who was now Eric Redmond's wife.

The native's face became purple with rage. He shook one crutch at the man on the deck.

"Who dares taunt Altoonah?" he shouted.

"No one taunts you," soothed Nick. "I offer you friendship and help. Helga is at this moment on her way north in one Viking ship. She shall be yours, if you will assist me in my plans."

Eagerness replaced the wrath on the Skraeling's face, but one of his followers stepped to his side and spoke in low tones to him, quite evidently urging him not to believe the treacherous foreigners.

Nick spoke in Johnson's ear. The Swede's rifle cracked, and the adviser of the Skraeling chief dropped to the ground without a sound.

Before any other feeling than surprise had had time to develop, Fratelli bellowed forth: "Who else wishes to lie to Altoonah, to try and turn him against his good friend?"

There were no takers. Altoonah held up his hand as a sign of amity, and released Friday. Altoonah and his party came on board. Noting that the chief was dressed in imitation of the Vikings, and that his features betokened a high degree of intelligence, the gangster did not offer him gaudy handkerchiefs, or the like, the sort of present which had won Friday, the Eskimo. Instead, he gave him the sword and belt and scarf-buckle, which he had taken from one of the dead Vikings.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VIKING AIR RAID.

BETWEEN the peril of Helga Redmond, and the mystery of the overlong absence of the Viking scouting party—the five warriors who had been ambushed by Nick Fratelli's crew—there was great uneasiness and considerable activity in the plateau city.

A new and stronger scout patrol was dispatched, its strength greatly augmented by the armed presence of Jones, Murphy, and Little Arty.

Theresa had begged to go; and the request had brought from her hostess, Astrid, the single word *"Valkyr!"* It was pronounced with such horror that Terry blurted hastily to Angus: "Gee, Mr. Selkirk, I ain't that kind of girl, really!"

The young bishop and Angus requested Scarface to remain with them to plan their campaign, and he gladly accepted. He had already decided to add the Norse language to his accomplishments, and Borghild, the beautiful, volunteered to teach him.

So the expedition set forth, and in due course of time came upon the stripped and desecrated bodies of the five Viking dead and of the gangster Scutari. Two of the party were placed on guard, and a runner was dispatched back to the plateau with the news.

A little further on they ran into the pack of hyaenodonts that had been following Nick Fratelli and his gang. Five of the dog-beasts they killed, to lay at the feet of the five warriors when given Viking burial, this being the chief use made of these fierce denizens of the

woods; in fact, they were protected by Viking law, and not permitted to be slain except for this purpose or in self-defense.

When the runner reached the plateau, there was consternation there. Angus conferred with Scarface.

"We must get word to the scouts at once by glider," announced Angus, "instructing them to locate the gangsters and await reënforcements. Perhaps if we strike suddenly enough, we may overpower Fratelli's crew in spite of their weapons, for they are as yet very few.

"Would you like to make the flight in our new two-seated glider? We plan to drop the note of instructions to the scouting party, then try to locate the enemy from the air, and then drop a second note, informing our scouts of the enemy position. You can write this second note, and your three men, even if they cannot translate it to my troops, can at least lead the way by following your directions."

Scarface was tempted by the thought of Borghild, but the prospect of action, and the novelty of a glider-flight proved too strong, so he gladly assented.

"Of course, in such a long flight, you may be forced down," added Angus, "for these motorless planes are very tricky. But you can reach one of our parties, and have them guard the glider, disassemble it and ship it back."

"How do these things work?" inquired Scarface, now showing much interest; and he added:

"I've read about your flying experiences, but I never could quite figure how you did it. It's all very well to talk about taking advantage of shifts of wind and of every up-current of air, but why don't these shifts and up-currents come upon you too suddenly for you to take advantage of them?"

Angus Selkirk smiled indulgently.

"WE'VE learned a lot since Astrid, Helga, Eric and I built our first gliders out of *skwaa*-skin and split bamboo, when the Skraelings besieged us on this plateau. In those days we trusted largely to luck, and took the air-currents as they came. But since then we have made quite a study of meteorology, and have found that the gusts obey regular rules. By watching the ground and the clouds, we can tell just about what to expect and where to expect it.

"For example, we expect strong up-currents directly under clouds, and diffused down-currents just beyond their edges. We expect up-currents over plains; down-currents over woods, and even stronger ones over water. Near the ground the air is apt to rush in toward woods and water, while at higher levels the drift is just the opposite. If the wind is blowing toward a hill, it rises at the hill; if away, it falls.

"So, by watching the ground and the sky, we know what to expect, and are prepared to take advantage of it. But mostly we have learned the 'feel' of the air. We fight the air automatically, just as a boxer or a fencer fights his opponent."

"Have you any theory to explain these air-currents?" asked Scarface.

"Yes," replied the Scotch Viking. "We think that they are due to the sun's heating the earth unequally, owing to differences in soil. Hot air rises, cold settles. Clouds are warmed by the sun, and their under side remains cool.

"We imagine that these phenomena

are much more regular down here than on the outer surface of the earth, due to the fixed position of our central sun. But in both places they probably exist to a much greater extent than is dreamed of. They furnish the only possible explanation of how we are able to soar and gain height on calm days, with scarcely a trace of wind."

"Yes," confirmed Scarface, "I saw in the papers, shortly before leaving the outer earth, that gliders had actually stayed aloft in Germany for over eight hours."

"We have almost equaled that record here," asserted Angus proudly.

This conversation made Scarface all the more anxious to try one of these strange motorless planes.

SCARFACE said good-by—Angus giving him the words—to Borghild, and warmly pressed her hand. He took his automatic and all his 45-caliber clips—his rifle having been loaned to the leader of the reenforcing party. Then the glider was wheeled to the edge of the plateau, he was introduced to the young Viking aviator named Oskar Hiher; the two took their seats, and the machine was pushed off into space.

Oskar proved to be most expert. He slid and circled and spiraled, taking advantage of every shift in wind, every stratum and cross-current of air, always working higher and always tending southward.

In a very few minutes, it seemed, they passed over the sentries guarding the Viking dead, and then passed over the advance party, still pressing on down the trail. The message was dropped, and the glider kept on.

From their height, the Miami was soon spotted in the distance.

"Boat," said Scarface, pointing.

"*Yah, boat,*" replied the aviator.

Then reaching into a pouch beside him, he produced several round objects about the size of oranges.

"*Bomma,*" said he.

"*Yah,* bombs!" replied Scarface.

There were some things that they could mutually understand, in spite of their difference in language. The two men grinned at each other. Eight hundred years apart in race and customs, and the whole earth's crust apart in environment, nevertheless they were brothers under the skin.

Bombs! This was going to be fun! Scarface reached for one, but his companion shook his head and tapped his forehead. The meaning was plain: Scarface lacked the necessary air experience.

They arrived over the Miami at quite a height. The conference with Altoonah was still in progress, although that gentleman was not in evidence. There were, however, plenty of Skraelings on deck, and their relations with Swede and Friday were evidently friendly.

"*Skraelingna,*" announced Oskar, and Scarface began writing his report, stating that Nick and the Skraelings had already contacted, and were probably concocting an alliance.

No one on board seemed to notice the plane. Perhaps they mistook it for a large *skwaa.*

Circling to the southeast, the glider passed over a body of Skraelings on the march toward the coast. Some of these noticed the glider, and soon they were called to the attention of the whole party. This would never do. These savages would get in touch with the Miami, and ambush the Viking foot-parties.

Evidently the same thoughts were simultaneously passing through Os-

kar's head, for he asked hopefully, "*Bomma?*"

But Scarface shook his head. If they committed no act of hostility against these natives, the report of the natives, on reaching the Miami, would lack certainty as to whether the Vikings suspected their plans.

So Scarface shook his head and said, "*Nein.*"

That might not be the proper Viking word for "no," but he had already learned, when in doubt in speaking to a Norseman, to use the German word if he happened to know it.

The plane wheeled back toward the Miami again.

"*Skal yee bomma boaten?*" inquired the young Viking. Scarface sensed his meaning.

Why not bomb the boat? Strike before the alliance was formed. Disable the craft and its defenders, so that it might fall a prey to the scouting expedition, shortly to arrive; put an end to the war before it got fairly started. Why not?

"*Yah!*" shouted Scarface Boston Jimmy.

Down out of the sky swooped the glider with a rush, straight toward the Miami. The Skraelings on deck scattered, perhaps not realizing that this huge man-made bird was not a *skwaa*, but fearing nevertheless the swoop of so large a pterodactyl.

AS the glider barely skimmed the roof of the vessel, passing neatly under the aërial, between the masts, one of the orange-like objects was let go. It exploded against the side of the deck house with a loud detonation, laid two of the Skraelings writhing on the deck, and blew a huge hole in the deck house. Consternation reigned on the Miami.

"Too bad it wasn't further fore or aft," thought Jimmy. "Aft, it might have got the engines, and further forward might have disabled the navigating controls."

But how to explain this to the wild Viking at his side, who knew as little of English as he himself did of Norse?

Under the force of its own momentum, the glider climbed abruptly to quite a height, then turned and swooped down again toward the Miami. If there were only some way to explain to the flyer to strike at one of the ends of the ship!

Quite a group were gathering in the bow, and that gave Scarface an idea. His companion might not understand the location of the vulnerable spots in a motor yacht, but he would certainly get the idea of bombing a group of men; so Scarface nudged him and pointed violently toward the group in the bow.

"*Yah!*" said Oskar, and swung the nose of the glider, so as to pass over the men.

In one hand he held his bomb ready to hurl it among them, as he passed over their heads. But he never hurled it.

When he was still at a distance of about two hundred feet, a staccato rattle like that of a pneumatic riveting machine broke out from the bow of the Miami, and a rapid succession of small incandescent spots of light, like silver bees, shot whistling beneath them.

"Up! Up!" shouted Scarface, grabbing the joy-stick in the hand of the astonished Viking, and forcing it back against his chest.

Up soared the glider. But, as if it were a hose-stream being played upon them, up too rose the trail of silver bees deliberately to meet them; and,

when it met them, the Viking collapsed with a gurgle in his seat.

Scarface still held the stick, and he clung to it like grim death. He felt a tap on the side of his chest, then a warm tingling feeling there, and then a trickle down his side, but still he held on.

He passed beyond the Miami, but the clatter of the machine gun continued. Up, up, soared the glider, into a stall, and then a sideslip. Scarface tried to get his feet past the dead body of his companion and onto the foot-controls, to right her. He failed to reach them, but his efforts somehow shifted the weight and accomplished the desired result, for the craft righted and swung southward.

He now pushed the stick gingerly forward, so as to secure a gentle descent, and thus put as much distance as possible between his enemies and himself. Things were going beautifully. In spite of his lack of control of the stabilizer, the glider for some reason kept an even keel. The sound of the machine gun was fading away in the distance.

Scarface was just congratulating himself on his beginner's luck as an aviator, when the plane suddenly without warning went into a spiral nose dive and plunged into the sea.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

More Gold for Forty-Niners

ARE you a destitute "Forty-niner"? If so, just step up and collect your share of the Mullanphy Trust. It amounts to over a million dollars now, and from present indications it will reach a much more sizable figure before any of it is legally claimed.

The founder of the trust was touched with pity at the hard straits of the many California prospectors who failed to strike it rich—or even strike it at all—in the days of the gold rush. With the best and most philanthropic of intentions, he established a trust fund for their relief, but unfortunately he stipulated that it was to be used only for the relief of "destitute Forty-niners."

He overlooked the fact that a day would come when even the youngest of the Forty-niners would pass beyond the need of worldly charity. Thus the terms of the trust defeat its own charitable purpose, as it cannot be diverted to any other use, and so it grows, year after year, an annoyance to the courts rather than a help to the citizenry. From all appearances, it is likely to so continue, unless the celebrated California climate is even more exhilarating than the press agents modestly claim. In that case, we may some day read of a group of centenarian prospectors coming out of the hills, tired at last of their long and fruitless search for pay dirt, and demanding the bounty of the Mullanphy Trust to ease their declining years!

Dorothy Davidson.

Golden Gloves

Dan Webster, fight manager, was a pretty wise bird; but he was wrong if he thought he knew all the surprises the boxing racket had packed in its gloves

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

"Kid, them's golden gloves you're wearin'"

ANY way you would like to look at it, managin' knights of the square circle, so-called, ain't all milk and hooey. It's a tough racket; but it has its moments, like when I first run onto Mike Dorgan, one of the sweetest fighters that ever battled for a benefit fund.

I was in Missoula, Montana, havin' reached there from another place called Butte, and would of gone on to Spokane, Washington, and most likely never would of seen Mike, but for a coincidence.

Some citizen with a habit of pryin' into other people's business sees me on the top of the bus. As you can guess, the bus driver gets pretty mad when this fellow informs him there is a man lyin' flat on the roof. He tells me to get off and pay my fare or he'll call a cop, and he adds he's got a good mind to crack me on the chin anyhow.

Well, this comin' right after what has happened in Butte, I can see where the open spaces of Montana ain't goin' to set so well on my digestion.

I had got out of Butte very sudden, when I seen that the man who had swore to uphold the law and order of the community would do nothin' for me. The man to who I refer is the sheriff.

"Mr. Webster," he said to me as I was tearin' down the main drag ahead of a bunch of people, "I'd sure like to help you, but what is one man's strength against a mob? Besides, that wet smack Hurricane Harry, which you told the public and the local sports writers was a prize fighter, is anythin' but. He used to work here in a shoe-shine parlor, and even the kids could lick him. His real name is Patsy Dalia."

"I know that," I said without stoppin'. The sheriff grabbed for his gun, while I slowed down to explain

that I only meant I knew Harry's right name was Patsy Dalia.

"Yeah?" grunted the strong arm of Justice. "That wasn't what you said; and if I was you I'd beat it before the boys catch you."

"What do you think I'm doin' now?" I cracked back, "skippin' rope?"

I could of punched Harry a sock on the nose myself, for not havin' told me that he used to work in that shoe-shine parlor in Butte.

But with three hundred infuriated miners under the impression that they have just been gypped on a bum fight, there was no time to let revenge and other low motives interfere with personal safety. Still, I hoped they get Harry and paste him a good one on the kisser for me.

That was how I left Butte and met this Mike Dorgan person, in the town called Missoula.

Mike was a likeable sort of guy after you got to know him better. He had a straight, good-lookin' nose instead of the customary pancake smeller which is so much the *bon ton* among pugilists. His eyes were blue or gray and kind of dreamy except when he was fightin'. Then they froze into twin hunks of blue ice. You could see the strength in his broad, well-formed shoulders, and his arms were shapely with just the proper amount of tough muscle ripplin' beneath white skin when he flexed his elbows.

The rest of him was built to match the arms and shoulders; as finely proportioned a figure as I ever seen in boxin' trunks. From his looks he might of been a college athlete. You could picture hundreds of women moonin' up at him and gurglin', "Gee, Mike, you're handsome!"

Amateur standin' and clean sportsmanship were written all over his face when I first seen him. Yet he was a fighter. Boy, he battled! I could grow gray-headed talkin' about Mike, and still be enjoyin' myself.

MIKE told me how all his life he had wanted to be a professional prize fighter. I asked him where he was workin', and what made him think he was cut out to be the next lightweight champ; because in spite of his fine build he didn't carry much tonnage.

"Mr. Webster," he begins.

"Call me Dan Webster," I cut in on him.

"All right, Mr. Webster," he replies, "I will, and it's awfully nice of you to ask me to. Now, Mr. Webster, I can show you a lot of guys I've knocked out under amateur floodlights, and a lot of other birds I've fought with where I work."

"That's fine," I says. "Who was these guys? College chums?"

Mike bursts out laughin' and I can see he ain't lost any of his teeth yet.

"Say," he explains, "I never even went to high school. There wasn't a teacher in the place knew more about fightin' than I did."

"Yeah?" My eyebrows go up like the elevator in the Woolworth Building. I've got a feelin' right now that even if Mike Dorgan turns out to be good it won't be no news to him. He knew it beforehand.

"I'd like to see you work out some time," I add for the sake of politeness. "Where do you generally hold these sock séances?"

"Down at the railroad yards," he says pleasantly. "Come down with me now if you've got time, Mr. Webster, and maybe you can get a better idea of my stuff."

Mike pays no attention to the fact that my Adam's apple is bouncin' up and down my throat. I'd of picked him a hundred to one for a white-collar job and figured I had a sure bet. I'm still clingin' to the hunch that maybe he's a brass pounder or a freight clerk, when he knocks that theory for a nose-dive.

"Yep," he continues, "I'm a locomotive fireman on the Transcontinental and Pacific. My regular run just now is Number Six, a hot-shot fast freight that cannonballs out of here westbound every night at eleven fifty-six. I've got lots of time."

We are still talkin' about how much Mike wants to trade a coal scoop for a pair of padded gloves when we reach the freight yards and start over the tracks toward a soot-blackened shack that Dorgan claims is the railroad Y. M. C. A. He has his paraphernalia there, he tells me. Trunks, sweat-shirt, shoes, boxin' gloves and etcetra.

Halfway across the yard Mike points to a big hairy-armed brakeman that's leanin' against a empty box car rollin' himself a cigarette.

"He's a lot bigger'n I am, ain't he?" asks Dorgan, bristlin' like a tom-cat lookin' at a yellow pup.

I nod, and half a minute later when we're walkin' past this guy Mike gives him a nudge with his elbow that scatters the makin's to the four winds. I bein' right behind Mike, the big tramp grabs me by the vest.

"Hey!" he snarls, spinnin' me to him: "What's the idea of bumpin' into me like that?"

Mike keeps walkin' down the track; and judgin' by the way the brakie is screwin' his mouth into nasty faces, things don't look so good for Dan Webster. All that I get for tryin' to explain that it was his friend Mike Dorgan that had spoiled his cigarette, is a promise of a extra smack on the button for lyin'.

"MIKE!" I holler, and Mike stops in his tracks. He wheels, looks at us both like he'd never seen either one of us before, and don't move.

Suddenly recognition seems to dawn on him. He twists his face into a bloodthirsty grin, lets out a whoop that would of scared a Blackfoot Indian, and comes poundin' toward me and the brakie like a dozen wild cats. The brakeman lets go of me and squares off to meet the onrush.

"What do you mean, pickin' on a friend of mine?" shouts Mike. "You're always startin' a fight."

Wham-wham! One-two; and a brace of swift, powerful, perfectly-timed blows land the big brakeman sprawlin' in the cinders, cursin' with a jaw that he thinks is broke.

Mike dusts off his hands like he hates to contaminate them with such inferior vegetables, while I stand there fish-mouthed, figurin' the business possibilities in a guy with a wallop like Mike Dorgan, if he is properly handled. More numbers than is in a telephone book are whirlin' through my head, and they're all potential gate receipts.

"How's that?" says Mike, bringin' me back to earth with a start. "Come on, let's go over to the gym now."

Mike gets into his fightin' duds over at the Y. M. C. A. First he shows me some lively work with the light punchin' bag. He shadow-boxes around to demonstrate he's lighter on his feet than a dancing master, but he has trouble coaxin' any one to stand up and swap socks with him for a round or two.

Finally, after me tellin' the boys that it's all in fun and Mike won't hit hard anyhow, and givin' a couple of them a few bucks, Dorgan obtains a half dozen brave bohunks willin' to stand up to him.

Mike is like a prima donna gettin' a first audition. He shows me all he's got; which is plenty, and hard on his temporary sparrin' buddies. Clever infightin', deadly accuracy and precision in his long-range shots, fast footwork, and a quick-workin' brain that seems to be in control of the whole fightin' machine—all are in the bag as far as Mike's concerned.

"Kid," I says to Mike, "them is golden gloves you're wearin'. Judiciously used against the proper persons at a high admission price, they're goin' to make a lot of money for you and me."

"Do you think so?" asks Mike. "I'm kind of afraid of real professional fighters."

"Nonsense, boy!" I replies, not knowin' how seriously he meant it. "A little stage fright at first maybe, but you'll soon get over it. You've got the stuff."

"Gee! You sound encouragin', Mr. Webster," goes on Mike. "I'll quit my railroad job to-night if you say so."

SO I says so, and for the next few weeks I get Mike into shape for his comin'-out party in the rosined ring. Mike snaps into trainin' like a thoroughbred, works hard, keeps steady hours, and I don't have no trouble on account of him turnin' out to be a secret drinker or a skirt chaser, or nothin' like that.

The hardest job I have is to keep tellin' him every night that he's as good as most professionals in his class right now, and a lot better than a whole flock of them that still draw crowds to the fight arenas.

"I hope so," says Mike. The mental toe-hold this word "professional" has on him gets me mad.

It don't sound reasonable that an otherwise normal guy, who will knock brakemen and firemen all over the lot just for the joy of it, can get buffaloed by a guy who maybe isn't as tough to handle, but happens to make a business out of boxin'.

For Mike's openin' fracas I arrange a six-round preliminary on an already full card that's goin' to draw a big crowd in Seattle because two smart welterweight crown contenders is the feature number. I'm pleased, my idea bein' to get stage fright and crowd consciousness snapped out of Mike at the beginnin'. I figure that once he steps into the ring and feels the rap of an alien glove on his chin, he won't think of nothin' but fightin'.

Mike is a bit nervous when he steps through the ropes and sits on the swingin' stool opposite "Lightnin'" Jim Brady, who ain't half as hot as he looks and sounds. Brady is in his own corner wrinklin' his bushy black eyebrows and scowlin' and makin' his teeth grind, as if he was goin' to eat Mike instead of fight him.

"Mike," I whisper to him, "that guy's a bum. Wind and noise. Don't let a case of nerves throw you. Take it easy the first round or two till you find out what a false alarm he is. Then go in and kill him."

"He don't look like a bum," moans Mike, and I could of kicked him in the pants: "Besides, his name is Lightnin'. They wouldn't call a bum by that name, now would they? He looks like a real fighter; a professional, Mr. Webster, and I hope I can—"

"Don't hope nothin'!" I snaps. "The guy's a set-up for a fighter like you. Go get him, baby."

Mike goes out, and in the first stanza does what I told him not to. He starts off like a windmill in a tornado. He's wide open in a lot of places at a lot of times; but he's so fast and furious he has this Lightnin' Jim pop-eyed, tryin' to dodge the wallops and figure what it's all about at the same time.

Mike sends a haymaker over that grazes Brady's ear, drawing blood, and Brady clinches just to make sure he's fightin' one guy and not the police reserves. The referee unloosens them, and in spite of my yellin' at him Mike, stage-struck as a kid speakin' his first piece at a Sunday school entertainment runs amuck all over the place.

Brady catches one on the chin that lands him on the mat. He ain't damaged none, but he enjoys the rest layin' down there on the floor till he hears "Eight." When he gets up he decides he knows what's the matter with the madman opposite him, and he settles down to some fancy bicycle ridin' out of range, with occasional clinches to vary the program.

THUS pass three rounds. Mike is gettin' tired, but he won't slow down, and he's so used to missin' Brady by this time that it don't make no difference. Brady, who takes three rounds to figure out a play anyhow, has got a nasty wallop when he can use it. Toward the end of the third he takes time by the forelock and Mike on the button. He sees his chance and he grabs it. Mike goes to sleep for the full ten, havin' put up a horrible exhibition of a ravin' maniac with gloves on his hands.

I tell him so when I'm bawlin' him out in the dressin' room.

"I knew you was only kiddin' me," groans Mike. "Brady was good. He's a real professional fighter."

"Oh, hell!" I shouts. "Will you shut up?"

The next day Mike is feelin' ashamed of himself, and so am I. After all, it was the kid's first fight; and a lot of others has made a first public appearance that wasn't so creditable either.

"How about a little workout?" I suggests.

We go over to a gym, and Mike is champ material all over again. Finally I figure out that what he's got is what the high-hat, fifty-cent word venders call a inferiority complex; which I gather is just opposite to what a lot of other people has, who think they're good but ain't. Still, that don't help me none because I don't know how to cure it.

Mike's good. He keeps sayin' he's good and he demonstrates it in the ring when he's boxin'; but the minute he lines up against a professional, his confidence and fightin' sense flows out of him, like somebody had left both taps runnin' in the bathtub.

It's a tough break for both of us. Mike's golden gloves are loaded with lead every time he performs for paid customers. Yet he still enjoys murderin' friends and chance acquaintances who is bigger than him, and with whom he can pick a brawl.

After five months of consistent failure to deliver the goods in the monetary prize ring, I try him out with the lowest in his class—plain set-ups for a guy like Mike—and they paste him all over the lot.

Mike is givin' a bunch of guys reputations as fighters which they ain't in the least entitled to, and I see that somethin' drastic has to be done. Dor-

gan is gettin' unhappy and moonin' because he's a total flop, while the finances I have invested in him on food, trainin' and bets is pilin' up on the red side of the ledger.

"Well," I says, "Mike, you're a nice kid and I like you. But somethin' has to be done."

"I'll do anythin' you say, Mr. Webster," declares Mike. "You've been awfully decent to me, and I guess I'm just a bum as a professional prize fighter."

He gulps kinda fast and blows his nose, though I know he ain't got any cold; I can see he's taken things to heart very seriously. He's like a guy that's in love with a dame and is heartbroke because she won't give him a smile.

"I'll think of somethin' in twenty-four hours," I says. "In the meantime you just forget about thinkin' you're a bum. You ain't. You're good; but this inferior complexion of yours has got your shoulders on the mat every time you step into a prize ring."

AT the time I pull this remark, more to make him feel good than anythin' else, the only thing I can think of is for him to go back to playin' with a coal scoop and a slice bar in the cab of a locomotive; but I wouldn't of told him so for a thousand bucks. It is well I don't, because I get an idea about one o'clock that A.M., and I wake Mike up to tell him about it. He says he'll try it.

"You really ain't afraid of anybody but professionals, are you?" I asks, smilin'.

"No, I ain't," says Mike solemnly. "I'll battle all the rest. Size don't make no difference either."

We're in a small drum in North Dakota at the time and there's a big fair and carnival goin' on at Fargo, which is where we set out for in the mornin'. I invest the last of my dough gettin' a ring set up, with a tent put over it; and I pay a deposit on the concession. Then I dope out a marvelous spiel to draw in the crowds.

After hirin' a couple of local boys to work as punchin' bags for Mike, I announce Mike the Mauler, the greatest battler of all times, and a lot more boloney. I'm buildin' up what the professors would call Mike's ego, and I lay it on thick.

For the lowly sum of two bits, one quarter of a dollar, the natives is requested to come in and see this world-beater slap the bag and box a round or two with his sparrin' partners; and as a climax of generosity unparalleled in the history of showmanship the natives is invited, any of them that wants, to step into the ring and don the gloves against Mike Dorgan; the munificent sum of fifty bucks bein' gladly awarded to any one who can stand up two rounds against the Mauler.

Does it work? Boy, the racket is a success from the start! Mike's work is so pretty in the ring sparrin', that guys come two and three times to see the show. Quarters is pourin' into the till like water down a rainspout; and Mike lays out yokels, farm hands and others indigenous to the section with such scientific dispatch that we get emboldened to raise the ante to one hundred bucks for any one man enough to face two rounds of the Mauler's flyin' fists.

We even offer a two-hundred-dollar bonus for any one that can knock Mike for the count; and we don't have to pay nobody so much as a red nickel during our whole three weeks' stand in Fargo.

Mike feels better. He enjoys the

exercise. And I'm happy over the box office receipts and the swell condition Mike is gettin' into for his return to the regular ring, though I don't mention this latter to Mike for a long time.

We tour the country. Circuses, carnivals, old-home weeks, county fairs, apple-orchard festivals, wheat weeks, and bigger-ears-of-corn celebrations all bein' our easy money. Wherever and for whatever reason, country folks gather into the centers of rural population, we're there with our tent and our boxin' exhibition. And we make more money than all the other side shows combined, including the sword-swallower and the fat lady, who always get jealous of us.

Moreover, there appears to be an illimitable number of local wise guys who figure they can sock Mike on the right place to win them two hundred berries, or at least stay on their feet long enough to earn the hundred for two rounds.

It's surprisin' how many people can be wrong in a community.

AFTER a lot of this Mike takes to mopin' when not workin'. He's bankin' most of his dough, so the immediate effect of sudden wealth ain't noticeable in him. He don't go in for flash clothes, nor sparklers, nor placin' his money on the gee-gees. He just develops a deep sorrow.

"What's the matter?" I ask him one day. "I always said you was good, and ain't you been provin' it all over the country?"

"It's nice of you to say that," says Mike, "but the novelty has wore off and I'm not happy any more."

"You can retire in another year," I tell him. "At the rate you're goin' we'll soon be ridin' in tailor-made limousines, with a chauffeur in uniform and a flunky in gold braid and brass buttons to open the door."

"I don't want no limousine with brass buttons on it," wails Mike. "It's the old yen, Mr. Webster. All I want to make me happy is to be good enough to be a professional prize fighter."

Bein' a man with patience and control I didn't heave a chair at him, but I would of liked to.

"You're good enough now," I says.

Mike shrinks back. The old hunted look comes into his eyes.

"I—I don't think so. Not yet, anyhow, Mr. Webster."

There's no sense arguin' with a guy like that, so I walk out on him. We're at a place in Idaho where they're celebratin' Idaho Big Potato Week, and the streets are jammed with people. All over the town I see nothin' but billboards announcin' a fistic carnival to delight the followers of King Sock-'em, which is to take place the end of the week. The contenders in the one bout which is scheduled to run fifteen full rounds ain't yet announced. I guess it was these signs that made Mike feel so low in the stomach.

The day before the fight two guys call on me. Both is fat and sleek and armed with a vestful of cigars, and neither looks any too honest.

"You're Mr. Webster," they say, "aren't you?"

"So far as I know," I reply. "I was never told different."

"Well," they continue as I hand them both a freezin' look, "we're in trouble, Mr. Webster, and we wondered could you help us out?"

"It don't cost nothin' to wonder," I says, "but why don't you try the police department?"

"You don't understand, Mr. Webster," says one of the guys. "Let me explain."

I let him, and he tells me that they are the lads who are puttin' on the fight. They've already sold the local house out, and now at the last minute they've only got one fighter, the other egg havin' run out on them.

"Oh!" I says, lettin' on I wasn't interested. "What am I supposed to do—break out in tears?"

"No," they say. "This is serious. We thought maybe you'd like to earn a little easy money and help us out. How about that ham of yours, Mike the Mauler, takin' on our remainin' guy?"

"Who is this remainin' pugilist?" I ask them. "Maybe he's not good enough for Mike."

They laughed.

"He's too good," they say. "He's known in fistic circles as P. Dalia. I guess you've heard of him."

My heart stops beatin' for fifty seconds while I control myself; and I finally do keep from sayin' that this Dalia ham worked in a shoe-shine parlor in Butte once and ought to be back there.

"No," I says, "I never heard of him." And at the same time I'm wonderin' what good deed I ever done to have such a hunk of luck land in my lap.

"However," I go on, "I'll talk it over with the Mauler and let you know."

"As to terms?"

"We can discuss those later," I says.

MIKE gets a twinge of the old stage fright when I brace him with the proposition, but I manage to talk him into it, even gettin' him enthusiastic about the idea.

"I know this bird," I tell Mike, "but don't you tell anybody I said so. He ain't really a professional prize fighter. He's terrible. He used to work in a shoe-shine parlor in Butte."

"Yeah?" says Mike, feelin' better already. "That's fine. I guess I can lick him, then."

"Lick him? If you don't kill him, I'm off you for life," I says, and Mike laughs.

The details is all arranged. New handbills announcin' the comin' fifteen-round set-to between Mike the Mauler and P. Dalia, the Northwest's greatest, is scattered all over town. I've chiseled swell terms out of the two fat boys, because they was up against it and couldn't help themselves none. But more than the money angle, I'm figurin' that a kind Fate has tossed a great chance at Mike to get into the regular ring racket.

Mike's opponent don't arrive till just before the time set for the smackin' session. I'm in the dressin' room, bolsterin' up Mike with a lot of ga-ga about how easy a pushover this guy from a shoe-shine parlor will be. Which is true, if Dalia ain't improved a lot since he was in Butte. And from my past experience with the palooka, he ain't the improvin' kind. Bad to worse, is the regular sequence of guys of his type.

One of the fat boys bursts into the room lookin' worried. He calls me outside.

"Listen," he whispers, "how's your man feelin'?"

"In the pink," I says. "Why?"

"The other fellow's mad as a hornet," says the fat guy. "I'm afraid he's goin' to kill your man."

I snickers.

"No laughin' matter," protests the promoter of the show. "He could do it all right. This really ain't nothin' to get sore about, either; he's red-

eyed mad because he says them handbills we printed didn't get his name spelled right. He spells it with an 'h.' Patrick Dahlia. . . . Dahlia, like the flower, you know. You wouldn't think a fighter would get mad about a thing like that, would you?"

"No," I says, "you wouldn't."

My head was hummin' like an electric fan; but I don't get a chance to do any thinkin' because the fat boy goes on and says the crowd is outside yellin' for the show to commence, and Patrick is sittin' out there makin' faces at them, and is my man ready?

"Sure," I says. "Let's go!"

We go out into the arena, and this time it's me that's nervous. Sittin' over in the enemy's corner is an overdeveloped ape. Moreover, he don't look dumb either. One glance, and I can tell this Patrick Dahlia is as different from the Patsy Dalia on account of which I left Butte, as granite is from putty. I try to control my face and steal a glance at Mike. Mike is smilin'.

"I'm glad you told me he's really a shoe-shine artist," whispers Mike as he clambers under the ropes. "Now that I look at him, he appears like that would be about his speed."

GEE, I don't know what to do! If I tell Mike to go careful, I'm afraid he'll think I was kiddin' when I said he was goin' to fight a pushover. And if I don't warn Mike, this Dahlia guy looks good enough to put it over on him if he ain't careful.

Dahlia gets up, rubs his feet in the rosin and stretches himself on the ropes. Perfectly coördinated muscles ripple across his back.

It's stuffy in the hall where the fight is bein' held, but not warm enough to make me perspire the way I'm doin'.

Mike sits in his corner while the announcer bawls out his name to the cash customers. He gets up smilin' and acknowledges the mild cheer. A lot of the fans have seen him operate in our tent. They're bettin' on him, I know. I also know that the fat boys is secretly coverin' all bets, and I hope everythin' is goin' to be all right. But hope ain't always a heavy staff to lean on.

Mike feels curiosity and a little excitement; he's confidently wondering how a shoe shiner can fight. He's licked almost everythin' else in his career but prize fighters.

Dahlia is wearin' red trunks with a big flower embroidered over his left hip. He's got small, expressionless eyes that can look dangerous, but nothin' else. His chest and stomach is covered with a mat of black, curly hair.

"The referee wants you," I yell in Mike's ear, and I can see his throat tightening. He saunters to the center of the ring, walking as softly as a panther sliding through the jungle.

Dahlia waddles over, but there's a spring in his step. He's bigger than Mike, his arms a trifle longer. Dahlia eyes Mike for a second, and then the gloves are put on both men.

"Shake," says the referee.

Dahlia's right glove touched Mike's.

The bell!

Mike jumps up and moves across the white glare of the cluster lights. Dahlia waddles to meet him. The crowd is silent. Mike leads off with a perfect left feint and a hard right to Dahlia's jaw.

Dahlia blinks his eyes. He feels that one. Mike keeps right on. A left to the body, a right to the head, another left. Dahlia takes them all. His body seems to tense a little, his head cocks the smallest trifle to one side. He's gettin' warmed up, mad at the

stingin' blows that have found their mark on him.

Wham! A heavy right snaps out. Mike ducks and catches it on his shoulder, and plows in with his old one-two, bouncin' his left off Dahlia's head.

Mike's fightin' a great battle. But he ain't gettin' very far. He's doin' most of the work. Dahlia's carefully sizin' him up, anybody can see that.

"HE ain't so bad for a shoe shiner at that, is he?" says Mike, bubbling through the sponge his face is bein' wiped off with.

I don't answer him right away. I'm tryin' to figure how to tell him to be careful, without lettin' him think I believe his opponent is any good.

Was I nervous! Boy, this Dahlia was no upstart. I seen that in one round and I was wonderin' who them fat boys who had covered all the local bets had rung in on us. I'd of swore there was somethin' familiar about his fightin'.

I'd of also swore that Patrick Dahlia, with or without an "h," wasn't this bird's right name. But I didn't want to say nothin' to Mike. Whoever the guy was, I wanted Mike to trim the hair off his chest.

"Mike," I says, "take it easy. The customers want to get a few rounds for their money. Don't polish him off till about the tenth, anyhow."

"Just as you say, Mr. Webster."

He shakes the sponge water out of his ears and smiles like a kid watchin' a schoolhouse burn down.

Mike takes it easier in the second and third stanzas and Dahlia, thinkin' Mike is fought out already, opens up and takes a lot of arm exercise. Mike dodges most of the wallops, and he takes those he can't miss like a martyr sufferin' in a good cause.

"How about now?" he says to me before he steps out for the fourth. "Can I kill him yet?"

"Wait a while," I says. "You've got lots of time, boy." I wanted him to wait till Dahlia got a little more tired.

Dahlia starts the play with a rush and Mike, fightin' sense gettin' the better of cold judgment, meets him with a long right to the head that rocks the ape to his toes. Mike follows it up with two uppercuts that lifts the crowd to its feet cheerin'. They're gettin' their money's worth and showin' their appreciation of the same.

The wallops was beauties and they do just what I expected they'd do. They unleash a demon in red tights at Mike. Dahlia throws everything he's got Mike's way, and Mike catches a left on the jaw that lays him flat, his head tinglin'.

Mike stays down for six of the fatal ten counts, and when he gets up I heave a sigh of relief to see he's got sense enough to keep hoppin' out of the other guy's way till his head clears a bit. He's just about ready to fight again, and his eyes has froze to blue ice, when the bell rings.

"I'm goin' to get him this time," he snaps at me. "That wallop hurt, and I ain't goin' to let no shoe shiner paste me all over the lot."

There's nothin' I can do, so I let him fight, hopin' Dahlia will get wild again. Dahlia does; and Mike bounces him off the ropes with a left to the chin in the first ten seconds of the round. After that you'd of thought it was a grudge fight.

I glance over at the fat boys and I can see they ain't feelin' well. But I'm too busy watchin' Mike to try and figure out just then who this Dahlia guy really is. Some fights are like that.

If guys was puttin' a rope around your neck to hang you, you wouldn't pay no attention to them, bein' so intent on the two flashin' figures dancin' in and out and landin' smacks on each other in the ring. Not many fights are like that, but some are. And the battle between Mike Dorgan and this Patrick Dahlia was one of them.

DAHLIA goes berserk, swingin' a windmill of fists. He bores into Mike, takin' hard rights and lefts in an attempt to get in a haymaker. Mike drives him back; he tries again. Both men are puffin' hard. *Smack! Wham! Crash!* The blows Dahlia's catchin' are comin' so fast you can't count 'em. And he knows how to take punishment, what I mean.

The bell rings at what seems like long intervals, and in between gongs both men is doin' their level best to lay each other flat. Mike ain't by no means unscathed. He's taken a lot of nasty socks. But his wind seems to be holdin' as he starts mixin' in the twelfth.

Dahlia looks pretty well cut up. Blood streamin' from a cut under his right eye. His left lamp black and swellin' in spite of all his handlers can do in the rest periods. In a way Mike's frozen glassy stare makes him look like he's out on his feet. It's a cinch neither one of the guys can stand the pace much longer.

Suddenly Mike shakes his head, slows down, pulls himself together. As his eyes measure the distance to Dahlia's jaw, I can see he's makin' one last effort. If this don't work he'll be too groggy to try again.

Suddenly Mike's straight right snaps forward with the old vigor he had in the first round. Where he gets the reserve strength to draw is as much a mystery to me as to Dahlia, who catches the beautifully timed blow smack on the jaw.

Smilin' foolishly, Dahlia crumples. He don't flop, he just folds up like a soggy blanket and slumps to the floor. Mike reels, almost landin' on top of Dahlia in the follow-through. He's too dazed to find a neutral corner for several seconds, while the referee is waitin' to start the count.

It didn't matter. He could have taken a half hour, Dahlia would of laid where he was.

They lifted Mike's hand, and announced him "thuh winnah." As I was helpin' him out of the ring he says to me, "Gee, Mr. Webster, that guy sure was a tough fighter for a shoe shiner. He took pretty nearly all I had."

"Yeah," I says, without lyin', "he surprised me too."

SOME time later, havin' sold the tent and the ring we used to set up for the carnivals, there's an item in the papers which I don't show to Mike because I don't want to get into trouble with him, or receive no smack on the kisser from a guy that can hit like he can. We've gone back to regular prize fightin' and Mike's takin' the boys in his class like a cat takes milk.

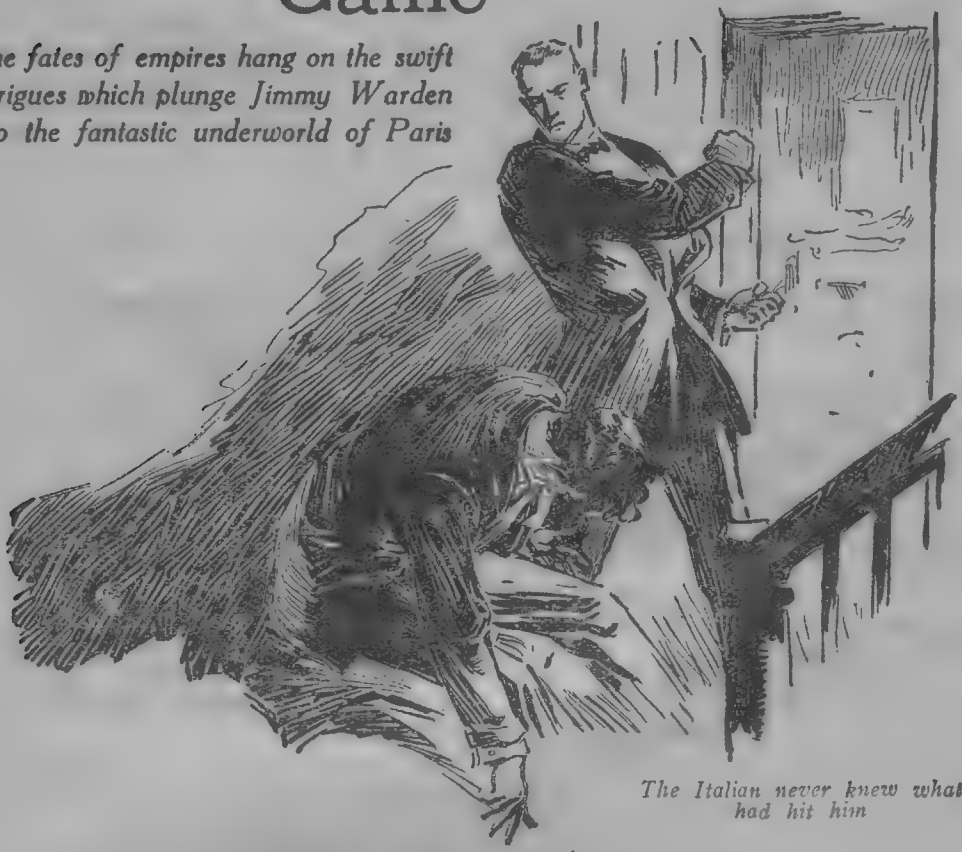
The item? Well it hints that all is not right in Fistiana. Somethin' smells there like it does in Denmark; namely and to wit that Swifty Jack Sanka, one of the most promisin' contenders for the lightweight championship, has been playin' the outlands, ringin' in easy money with a couple of fat sharpshooters who have been fightin' him as a guy named Patrick Dahlia.

As I said before, when I read that I don't say nothin'.

THE END.

John Solomon's Biggest Game

The fates of empires hang on the swift intrigues which plunge Jimmy Warden into the fantastic underworld of Paris



The Italian never knew what had hit him

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Cyrano," "The Mysterious John Solomon," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

SIGNOR DOMINETTI, unscrupulous guiding genius of a vast organization of international crooks, has clashed many times with the mysterious cockney, John Solomon, whose power and organization are equally secret and incalculable.

But now Dominetti has struck, bombing and sniping Solomon's headquarters in all Europe's capitals, and killing his agents in various "accidents." Solomon, man of Oriental mystery and cockney humor, marshals his forces against Dominetti's plot to conquer Red Russia and put the crooked Grand Duke Basil on the throne. Solomon gets Fascist Italy to back another claimant, Sergei Romanoff.

June Tully, *en route* to Solomon with formulas of a mysterious destructive ray invented by an American professor, is kidnaped by a Dominetti

This story began in the Argosy for February 15.

agent, Frank Halsey, who also robs a Chinese statesman, Dr. Lee.

A young American ex-diplomat, James Warden, rescues June from Dominetti, but she is recaptured. Warden reaches Solomon in Paris with a copy of the formula. The cockney sends his right-hand man, Dick North, with Warden to her rescue. She is being held in a Dominetti retreat in the suburbs.

In the "Abode of Bad Spirits," an unsavory night club, Warden outwits Halsey by switching to him a drugged *liqueur* intended for June Tully; and June escapes. The drug, a concentration of hashish, has the effect of destroying a person's ability to evade or lie to a questioner.

But Dominetti's men—the Russian Glazunoff, and the Jap Matsura—gain their object, to discover the word cut out of the secret formula and carried in June's mind, by capturing and torturing Solomon's chemist, Pearson.

CHAPTER X.

SECRETS.

JIMMY WARDEN, alone in the passage beneath the Abode of Bad Spirits, had not the ghost of an idea whither the passage led. Beyond, in the glow of occasional electric lights, lay the sharp turn; gaining this, he found ascending stairs that twisted off to the left. Still no one in sight.

"It's a cinch this leads somewhere," he reflected, "and evidently well out of this joint into some other underworld hole. And with these birds, whoever shoots first and talks afterward, comes out on top. So go ahead, James, and keep your eye skinned!"

The stairs ended in a door, of modern but massive construction. Gingerly opening this, Warden found himself facing a dark corridor, with a streak of light showing from beneath a door to the right. He entered the corridor, closed the door behind him, turned the key in the lock, and went on toward the thin streamer of light. He came to the door, listened, then stepped sharply to one side.

The heavy tread of a man was coming to the door.

"Fools!" said a voice in Italian. "Shots, p o l i c é in the street, devil knows what next—why aren't they back?"

The door swung open, and a man came out into the corridor. Warden had not the least notion where he was, or who might be in that room. A shot here might ruin everything unless it were needed—and it was not needed.

Standing to one side, he glimpsed a tall, thin figure, the delicate features of a poet or artist; then his fist crashed home to the angle of the jaw. The unfortunate Italian never knew what had hit him. He went down and stayed down, but the noise of his fall brought no one else.

Warden glanced into the room, found it empty, then turned to his victim. He dragged the limp figure into the light—only to rise, after a moment, soberly enough. In falling, the man had been hurled headlong against the wall, and some projection of the stones must have smashed his skull like an egg-shell.

It was one thing to shoot a man, hot-blooded—another to kill him in this fashion. However, any feeling of regret Warden might have had, vanished swiftly enough once he considered the place in which he now found himself, and the recent activities of the late unknown.

The room proved to be large and

long, two windows at the far end, no others. A long central table was loaded with a multitude of things, and illumined by two low-hung lights. The walls, run to the ceiling with shelves and cupboards, displayed many bottles in sight—at first glimpse, Warden thought the room some sort of laboratory. He went to the table and looked at what the Italian had evidently been doing—making up tiny packets of a white powder from a large glass jar.

Warden smelled it, crumpled it between his fingers, tasted it—and the meaning of this pleasant occupation broke upon him. Cocaine!

Then, recalling what the man had been saying, he strode quickly to the windows at the far end, pushed aside the curtains, looked out. The room was above the street, on the second floor—and several doors away from the café. He saw a crowd in the street below, caught the glitter of uniforms, but could make out no details.

Satisfied that the Bad Spirits were in good hands, he left the window and gave more particular attention to his surroundings. He had, at least, some little time before the former occupants of this place would return—and he was curious.

HE dropped into a chair, lighted a cigarette, and surveyed the long room with more attention; which, as it proved, was more than deserved. The burden of the table alone was most interesting.

A telephone stood close at hand. Aside from the apparatus of the snow merchant, one entire end of the table was piled with books, many of them open; books, chiefly, dealing with state documents—many of them rare and expensive works. The other end, about which several chairs were grouped, with a débris of cigarette butts, as though recently vacated by the gentry whom Warden had encountered, afforded more puzzling field for surmise.

Here were papers, letters, one of them half-written when interruption had come; some official stationery of the Paris Prefecture, and a large seal, also of the Prefecture—most astonishing stuff to be located here. A rack of pens and ink, a revolver fitted with a silencer—a cumbersome and lengthy weapon—and two curious keys strung on a piece of wire, completed the inventory.

"Hm!" reflected Warden, frowning a little. "The chap who was writing the letter dropped those keys on it—probably when he and his friends got the summons to come and get me. We might have a look at the letter."

Suiting actions to word, he pulled over the paper; the writing was in Italian, which Warden could read better than he could speak. When he had deciphered the unsigned and unfinished epistle, he sat staring at it blankly, startled beyond measure by its implications:

INSPECTOR LEBLANC:

At six in the morning a car will be awaiting you—not at your door, but at 51, Rue de Provence, just around the corner. It will contain a package. You will enter the car and be driven to the apartment of the man Ivan Vassilovitch, 42, Rue Theophile Gautier.

You will be in full uniform and will enter openly in your capacity as inspector of the Sûreté, taking the package with you. Ivan Vassilovitch is at the moment alone. You will shoot him, then place the contents of the package in his desk—the die in one drawer, the forged thousand-franc notes in another. You will then make your report that he attempted to resist arrest.

It is suggested that you report that Armand encountered you to-night and gave you one of the forged notes, stating that the man Ivan had changed it this afternoon with him. Armand will swear to this. You desired to question the man Ivan before making official report.

There the letter ended.

Warden blinked, then thoughtfully extinguished his cigarette. Leblanc, an inspector of the Sûreté, detective bureau of Paris, was evidently in cahoots with this precious gang; had probably furnished the note paper and seal of the Prefecture. As for this killing—

"The devil!" ejaculated Warden, sitting up. "Ivan Vassilovitch—why, that's Prince Ivan Salinoff, the grand old man of the aristocrats, the uncle and chief backer of Prince Sergei! Great Scott, that throws the whole damnable thing wide open! They murder Ivan, and they have the goods on him; forged bank notes, a life offense! They'll implicate Sergei somehow, and perhaps get him expelled from France. Sweet little system, this! This Armand is some merchant who'll back up this yarn by swearing that Prince Ivan changed one of the notes with him. The whole damned gang must be Reds!"

HE carefully replaced the letter as he had found it, glanced at the others, saw they were in Russian and beyond his powers. Then he rose to his feet and gave the walls a closer scrutiny. He paced up and down excitedly, wondering what he could do here, what he should do.

The shelves in sight held books, office equipment, odds and ends—nothing of any interest to Warden. He opened one of the cupboards, passed to the next; clothes, uniforms of various kinds, probably disguises. Then he halted. The next cupboard door revealed no clothes, but the front of a massive, old-fashioned wall-safe or cupboard, probably installed when this by-no-means-modern house was built.

What lay beyond this front of steel? Secrets, undoubtedly; Warden's hands clenched as he stood looking at it—how could he get past that barrier? Suddenly he started—he had observed that there was no combination lock here, merely a rounded knob for hand-grip, with a keyhole above and below. He tried it; the thing was locked.

Turning, he strode back to the table. Was it possible, indeed? Could the two keys so hastily dropped there—

Feverishly he tried them, found that they fitted the two locks. Already his whole scheme of action lay before him, half-formed, yet only awaiting the clarification of details. He knew that here he had only himself to depend on; Solomon was beyond reach; he had no idea where to find North.

If he could get out of this room and this house, well and good. The plotters would not suspect that he had possession of their secrets. The dead man lay in the corridor, certainly; but dead men told no tales. And if nothing here in this room was touched, they would think he had killed the man and fled.

If he had time! This safe might hold greater secrets than the mere life of a Russian prince, however important he might be.

The steel door swung open.

Warden saw before him a number of compartments or large drawers, none of which was locked. The face of these drawers was handsomely finished in inlaid woods, and the affair was obviously the relic of a generation when such things were most expensively done, but without proper regard for the wrong hands.

Pulling out a big drawer at the bottom, Warden discovered a large, heavy wrapped package, on which was penciled the name "Leblanc." This, then, was the promised packet of forged notes and die. The companion drawer to this seemed to hold nothing but a mass of papers. Warden passed on to the smaller drawers.

These would have richly repaid an agent of the Sûreté, but yielded nothing of interest to Warden. There was a good deal of extremely valuable jewelry, with packets of thousand-franc notes which might be either real or forged; there were letters in Russian script, whole packets of them; and Warden remembered what Solomon had said to Prince Sergei about the blackmailing affairs of the grand duke. However, these meant nothing to him, and he completed his examination without finding anything which appeared worth the taking.

As a last resort, he returned to the mass of papers in the large bottom drawer. He lifted them out—then halted, transfixed by sight of the large envelope lying below. Upon that envelope was printed the seal of the United States, and the words:

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Confidential

Jimmy Warden drew it out, left the papers where they were. He had never seen this word "confidential" so employed, but there were plenty of things in the diplomatic service of which he was beautifully ignorant. How had this envelope and its contents come here?

EXCITEMENT gripping him, Warden took from the unsealed envelope a remarkably handsome booklet of a few pages bound in tooled morocco—a document specially bound. He opened it, then, thunderstruck, carried it over to the table for examination beneath the lights there.

For five minutes he scanned the surprisingly brief text of this document, looked at the signatures of the President, the Secretary of State, the Italian and British statesmen who had affixed seals and signatures. Then, appalled, stunned, Warden lighted a cigarette and fought for sanity. The thing was preposterous, incredible—yet here was the proof under his hand, an original of a treaty.

A secret treaty—which, made public, would blast France into uproar, revolution, war! Stocks would crash, finances would be brought low, armies would be set on the march—

"How in the name of all that's holy, could the President have signed such a thing?" thought Warden. He seized the signature page, scrutinized the seals and writing there, laid the bound document down again. "It wouldn't be legal unless ratified by the Congress—yet there it is—and these precious scoundrels have one of the originals!"

The pact was brief enough, concerning only the chance of war between Italy and France. In such an event, Great Britain and the United States bound themselves to close the Suez and Panama Canals, and the Straits of Gibraltar, to all ships of the belligerent countries. Very innocent on the face of it—but meaning that France was cut off from all colonial troops, that her navy in the Atlantic and Mediterranean was separated, that her stocks would go smash, her credit be broken, at the very outset of hostilities!

Suddenly Warden wakened to the situation.

Time must be growing short—they would be back here now at any moment. He closed the drawers and the

safe, locked it, darted back to the table. There he dropped the keys again on the letter, replaced everything very carefully just as he had found it all. The treaty in its envelope he thrust into his side pocket, where it fitted snugly. A last glance around to make certain—

The telephone rang sharply, insistently.

Warden, already in the doorway, stepped on out into the corridor, then paused in the darkness there. The body of the Italian lay behind the open door, invisible. Why not answer the call, see who was on the line? It was tempting—but the envelope in his coat pocket forbade any risks. They must not suspect this was gone. Undoubtedly it had been stolen from a courier, perhaps from an embassy.

"Damn that phone! Hey! Why in hell don't youse guys answer it?"

At the voice, at the words, Warden whirled around—then swiftly shrank aside behind the open door, as far as possible. Another door had opened on the corridor. Now, cursing, a man came into sight, shuffling into the lighted room, hurrying toward the table and the ringing telephone.

Even from a rear view, Warden could not mistake the symptoms—the ghastly complexion, the jerky movements, the twitch to hands and nostrils. A hophead, and an American at that. The man snatched up the telephone.

"HELLO!" he snarled. "Yeah, this is Red Farrow speakin'—aw, can that stuff, will ya? Talk United States! No, there ain't nobody here, not a one. Who the hell are you? Oh!" His voice changed slightly. "Glazunoff, huh? Well, looks like I'm all alone. I dunno. I been asleep and just woke up."

Mr. Farrow looked astonished.

"Who, me? Well, I s'pose I can, sure. American girl, huh? Green and silver... Yeah, don't worry; any girl from home stands out on these here streets like a sore thumb, believe me. I don't see where these French dames get off—they don't none of 'em ever wash except with perfume, and they ain't never heard of razors—huh? All right. Go ahead."

Red Farrow looked sulky, but listened. So did Jimmy Warden. He knew at once they were speaking of June Tully, from that description, "green and silver." Farrow made a response now that confirmed it.

"Got away from Halsey, huh? Then she's a slick one, feller—any skirt who can slip that bird deserves a medal! Sure you want her croaked, do you? Get me right, now! I don't want no comeback on this from Halsey, see? All right. Now, where's this here street—sure to be dark and empty, huh? Gimme the name of it; spell it out so's I can show it to a taxi driver, M-o-n-t-o-r-g-e-u-i-l—my good gosh, that ain't a name, it's a Chinese curse! All right. I'll get right up there. You say she'll be makin' for thirteen what? *Bis?* What the hell's that? Same as 'and a half'? Well, all right. Yeah, they's a gun right here on the table. But you mind, now—Halsey's got to be fixed, see? I don't want him takin' me for no ride, not him! All right."

Red Farrow hung up. Then, evidently, he saw the cocaine bottle and little twists of paper for the first time. An incredulous chuckle broke from him; rising, he pocketed all the twists that had been prepared, then dumped out half the contents of the jar into another sheet of paper and wrapped it up carefully.

"If this ain't luck!" he muttered.

Jimmy Warden, watching through

the crack of the door, repeated the chuckle and the exclamation, but strictly to himself.

Red Farrow proved to be a rat-faced man, very thin and stooped, but sharp and alert in his motions. He helped himself to a liberal sniff of the white powder, then he took up the silenced gun and examined it. Once more Warden found himself tempted—and once more the envelope in his pocket gave him caution. One dead man might be found out in the hall, but he would have to shoot to be rid of this snow-bird; and he did not want to shoot.

He wanted Red Farrow to show him the way out of here. Ahmed ben Zain would still be waiting, in the square before the church.

Some five minutes afterward, Mr. Farrow descended a short flight of dark stairs, pushed open a door, and emerged on the street—not the Rue Jacob, but a tiny little street behind it. He walked jauntily along, whistling cheerfully to himself, and did not abate either his whistle or his strut when two strolling agents turned a corner ahead and stood there under the light as he approached. He did, however, come to an abrupt halt when something touched him in the back—touched him very hard.

"UP, Red!" cracked Warden's voice. "Stick 'em up!"

Mr. Farrow obeyed. Warden called to the agents.

"*Messieurs!* Here is a dope runner—his pockets are full of cocaine, and he carries a silenced revolver. He is an American crook who is probably wanted. With great pleasure I turn him over to your care."

Mr. Farrow was promptly taken in charge and pinioned, despite his voluble curses, by one agent, while the other drew Warden aside and requested explanations, papers and passports in no uncertain tone of voice.

Warden, as North had instructed him, gave his name and the address of Solomon, producing a card and writing down the address. Somewhat to his surprise—even though he was long past surprises where John Solomon was concerned—the agent bowed politely and made no further requests. He accepted a cigarette, however.

"Do you, by any chance," said Warden, holding a light, "know one Inspector Leblanc of the Sûreté?"

"But of a certainty, *m'sieur*," said the agent. "He is one of our officers the most efficient. He spent some years in Italy and knows the Italians very well. He was largely concerned in the happy outcome of the Garibaldi incident some time ago—you may recall it?"

"Perfectly," said Warden. "Well, I advise you to look after this rascal; you may find that he has a record and is wanted in America."

The agent laughed.

"If so, America will be disappointed for some years to come, *m'sieur*. We in France are much less gentle with the peddlers of cocaine than you in America."

Warden bade the agent good night, and walked away. Clearly enough, the name of John Solomon was quite well known; but at that, no one who handed over a crook whose pockets were stuffed with snow would be too seriously questioned as to himself.

"Mr. Farrow is silenced and put out of the way; good!" thought Warden, and patted his coat pocket. "They'll probably think he bumped off the Italian, grabbed all the snow in sight, and lit out—it 'll be several days at least before he gets in touch with any of

the gang or they discover where he is. Which, if I may say so, is pretty neat work, James! Now we'll see if our car is waiting—and we'll keep an eye on Rue Montorgeuil ourself. So June got away from Halsey, eh? Good for her!"

Jimmy Warden did a little whistling on his own hook, as he emerged before the old church of St. Germain and discovered that the Hispano was still awaiting him.

CHAPTER XI.

INSPECTOR LEBLANC.

"GO to the house of Solomon Effendi," said Warden to the Arab, "and wait in front of it. I expect some one to come there."

Soon they were purring up the quay to the Pont Neuf, then plunging into ancient Paris—a silent, medieval city at midnight, with its narrow streets; the madly hurtling taxicabs of daylight hours were gone now, pedestrians were few, everything was deserted and empty.

They came into Rue Montorgeuil and drew up before their destination. The great bronze gates were tight shut, not a light was visible.

At Warden's order, Ahmed ben Zain got out and pressed the button by the gates, but no answer came. No one opened.

Warden sat in the car where he could see the street in both directions. Would she come? Beyond doubt; the enemy were right enough in thinking so, and having heard the orders, Warden knew that for June Tully it was now a question of life and death indeed. He laughed softly.

At least, she had got away from Halsey—perhaps North had helped. But no! She was supposed to be alone, evidently. No matter; she was free, and therefore safe for the moment.

Upon Warden descended that comfortable, dangerous sensation, that feeling of everything being for the best and working out right, if only left alone. Perhaps Solomon's talk of "Providence" was not unjustified.

If North could only be reached—but that was impossible. Warden patted his pocket and thrilled to the feeling of the envelope there. What was he to do with this invaluable thing, at this time of night? It was well worth going to the Embassy, of course; yet he was more concerned with June Tully.

The signatures on that document, the text of it, had left him with a sort of stupefaction; the tremendous weight of responsibility had staggered him. It was literally true that in his pocket lay the course of history.

Publicity of this treaty would mean eruptions in France—riots, consulates attacked, furious outbursts in the Chambre des Députés and the Sénat, a government overthrown, perhaps revolution. International upheavals would follow, inevitably.

Dominetti was behind it, of course, and this nest of crooks was certainly headquarters for some of Dominetti's organization; they might have photographed the treaty already—but that would not be like publishing the actual document, having the original on view. No, they were checkmated now—thanks to Jimmy Warden and luck!

"Voilà, m'sieur!"

The windows of the car were a little blurred; a thin, fine mist had begun to fall, hardly a rain, yet sufficient to wet the cobbles of the street. The reflection of a car's headlights was glinting against the glittering street—a taxicab, slowly crawling along, the chauffeur craning out to examine numbers.

Warden got out of the car and waited, and the taxicab came to a halt ten feet away. Fully visible in the glare of the headlights, Warden stepped forward—and heard a quick cry.

"Jimmy Warden!"

June was out of the taxicab, greeting him with a joyous eagerness that could not conceal her vivid relief.

"Pay him, Jimmy, please!" she gestured to the bearded, grinning chauffeur. "I picked him up away down in Auteuil, and I haven't a red cent—I was sure Solomon would arrange it."

"Our friend John has shut up shop," said Warden. "You climb into my car, and I'll settle the bill, then we can talk things over."

THE taxicab departed. Warden got into the Hispano, told Ahmed to await orders, and took June Tully's cool, firm fingers with a quick grip.

"Congratulations!" he said. "I don't know how you managed it, but—"

"I don't know how *you* managed it!" she broke in, laughing excitedly. "Listen, Jimmy: in that cellar some one whispered to me not to touch the *liqueurs*—I think that woman who was with you. Who is she?"

"A lady supplied by Solomon," said Jimmy Warden. "What do you care, anyhow? You wouldn't even look at me."

"I didn't dare," she cut in quickly. "I was afraid they'd spot you if I did. And when we got out, Halsey must have drunk the wrong cognac."

"He did; I changed the glasses on him," and Warden chuckled. "What happened?"

"He went to sleep in the car. I stopped it, and hopped out and ran."

June Tully broke into a peal of laughter which gave warning to Jimmy Warden. She had been through a lot that night, and must be under a tremendous reaction now.

"Then, after a wait in a café, I got that taxi and came here. You say Mr. Solomon isn't around?"

"Nope. He's out of town," returned Warden. He went on to make the situation clear as regarded himself and North, but did not detail his adventures of the night. "What you had better do," he concluded, "is go to a hotel and stick around until Solomon shows up."

"But listen, Jimmy!" she broke in. "I've no money, nothing! I came over here to take a position with Solomon—"

"And you hit right in the middle of a thunderstorm," said Warden. "You've got to take shelter until it blows over, that's all. As for money, forget it. I'm not broke, and so far as I can see, North has an unlimited expense account, so you'll be well taken care of. And let me tell you something pretty definite: Halsey may like you a whole lot, June, but Dominetti doesn't. You know that scientific formula or whatever it is—therefore, the orders are out to shut your mouth so you can't give it to Solomon. There was another gent expecting to meet you to-night—"

He went on to tell of Red Farrow and what had happened to that gentleman.

"Now," he finished, "the minute Dominetti learns that the damage is done, he'll forget all about you. I'll make it my business to see that he's informed of it, too. All straight so far?"

"Yes," she rejoined. "But, Jimmy, it's sort of hopeless! I don't know what's going on or just what I can do."

"Well, right now I'm going to land you at a hotel," said Warden. "They know me at the Hôtel d'Angleterre, and will take you in without baggage if I vouch for you. I have a date with North to-morrow morning at ten—this chauffeur, Ahmed ben Zain knows where it is. I've got to use the car earlier in the morning, but it will be at your hotel at nine thirty, and you can trust Ahmed to the limit. Ahmed! Pay attention. I'll speak French for your benefit."

The Arab, in the front seat, slid back the dividing window and listened.

"At nine thirty in the morning, you be at the Hôtel d'Angleterre," said Warden. "Send up word to Miss Tully's room that you're there. Take her to where M. North awaits me, at the café in Boulogne. You understand?"

"Perfectly, *m'sieur*," said the Arab.

"Good. Go to the Hôtel d'Angleterre now."

THEY started off through the misty rain. June Tully sat silent, her face showing a look of hesitant perplexity as the street lights flashed past. Warden, meantime, was determining his own course. He wanted sleep first, for he had to be up and about at an early hour if he was to put over the coup on which he had set his heart. Since the whereabouts of June Tully was now unknown to Dominetti's men, she was in security—and was a safer agent than any one else.

From his pocket Warden took out the envelope, and laid it in her hand.

"Here, June; this is a far more precious secret than the letter from Loomis," he said soberly. "Take care of it, and give it to North in the morning, if I don't show up. I'll be there if possible, but you never know what 'll develop. Tell him he'd better take it right to the Embassy and get rid of it; he'll understand after he looks it over."

"But where will you be?" demanded the girl anxiously.

"Lord knows!" Warden laughed in his cheerful manner. "I'm off on the trail of something interesting. If I don't show up in the morning, I'll be there in the afternoon. Tell North, and he'll know I'm busy. The main thing with me, young lady, is your safety; that's why I'm in this whole game."

She was silent for a little. Then, unexpectedly, without the least warning, he felt her crumple against him, sobbing.

"Oh, Jimmy!" she cried, as his arm went around her. "I—I'm not so silly, as a rule, but I've been afraid—it's just the reaction. I tried to play a part with Halsey—tried to make the best of things, and smile, and make him think I liked him—but it was terrible! And the other men there—that horrible Glazunoff, who looks like a snake! At first, when he came aboard the boat and said he'd been sent by Solomon who was in London, I believed him. But he frightens me. He just isn't human. I know that awful things have been going on in that house, too—I don't know what. I could feel it in the air. And now, to have you show up when I needed you most—is just too much—"

Warden patted her shoulder.

"Those are sure welcome words, June," he exclaimed happily. "You'll have another chance to say 'em, too, when you're sure of what you're saying. Lots of chances! Everything's coming out all right, so you buck up and get a good night's sleep, and to-morrow you'll be able to do some shopping, and get clothes and things.

There's our hotel now; rather, yours. I'm staying at a place down near the Madeleine."

It was not difficult to see that the girl was on the verge of a breakdown, and small wonder. However, she pulled herself together, and was smiling when the hotel porter opened the car door, and she descended with Warden. As he was known at the hotel, Warden had only to present his card and explain that madame could not get her luggage until the morrow; and in a very few minutes the matter was arranged.

"Good night, young lady—pleasant dreams, and sleep hearty!" Warden smiled into her level eyes and marveled at their regained poise. "See you tomorrow; and above all else, keep that envelope safe. Good night!"

"Good night, Jimmy—and thanks for everything," she returned simply.

Warden returned to the car and paused before getting in.

"To our hotel, Ahmed," he ordered. "Grab some sleep, and show up at five thirty sharp—not a minute late. Understand?"

"Perfectly, *m'sieur.*"

"Have you a gun?"

The Arab's teeth flashed. "Two, *m'sieur.*"

Warden laughed as he got in and the car rolled away. He had good reason for laughter; June Tully safe, a night's work of triumph behind him, the enemy outwitted and hoodwinked at every turn, a keen, sharp game waiting him in which he held all the trumps—yes, he had every reason for exultation!

"This Dominetti gang isn't so confounded terrible," he reflected, as he alighted at his hotel and went to his room. "I've put it over on 'em from the start, with considerable aid from the goddess of luck. And in the morning—"

IN the morning, with a thin rain falling and promising to continue for a solid day or two, Warden dressed and found the Hispano awaiting him at the door.

"Go to 51, Rue de Provence," he told the alert Arab. "Stop there and stay close at hand when another car shows up. You might drop by a café on the way, for a cup of coffee and a roll, but make it snappy."

The street in question, in the old section behind the Hôtel des Ventes, was not far away, and at a quarter before six Ahmed halted the car at the proper number. This was an old building now converted into rooms and offices. Except for an occasional truck or cab, the street was empty at this hour.

Warden, keenly expectant, enjoying with every fiber of his spirit, the desperate game upon which he had embarked, left the car and was standing smoking at the curb when he saw the big Mercedes of Halsey approaching.

He waved his hand, and the Mercedes drew in behind his Hispano. The chauffeur was a trim, swarthy Italian, who regarded him with open suspicion until Warden spoke.

"Orders to intercept you, my friend!" said Warden cheerfully. "We just had word that Signor Dominetti is coming by special plane from London and will reach Le Bourget in an hour. You're to meet him there, and I'm to take care of Leblanc and his little errand in Rue Theophile Gautier."

The Italian gaped for an instant.

"Eh, *m'sieur?* And who are you?" he stammered, taken aback by mention of these names.

Warden waved his cigarette with a

smile. "I? Oh, a mere American—a friend of M. Halsey. By the way, is he still asleep, eh?"

The chauffeur grinned, and flung aside any further suspicion.

"You heard about that, eh? *Diavolo!* They say he sleeps like the dead! He hasn't heard a thing yet about the work in Rue Jasmin."

"In which he and I are one," returned Warden. "What work?"

"That accursed house, or laboratory, or whatever it is," said the Italian. "We blew the back of it to hell and burned the rest, last night. And the Englishman there is lying in the Bois now, unless they've found his body. To-morrow's newspapers will have some furious denunciations of the Duce, I promise you! All the work of these abominable Fascisti, and so forth. Well, I'd better be moving if I'm to make Le Bourget on time, eh?"

"Yes," said Warden. "Wait—take a message to Signor Dominetti or Halsey or Glazunoff, no matter which. Say that the American girl has reached protection and has told all she knows to Solomon or his agents."

The Italian's brows lifted. "So they didn't get her, eh? I thought Basil was a fool, to trust it to them. He should have used surer men. Right, comrade—until soon!"

And with a wave of his hand he threw in his gears. Ahmed, who had listened impassively, touched Warden on the arm; his eyes were wide.

"You heard, *m'sieur?*" he said in a low voice. "About the laboratory in Rue Jasmin?"

WARDEN nodded. Clearly enough, Solomon's predictions had been fulfilled — Dominetti had landed a blow, and a heavy one. If some such thing had been foreseen, why had not Solomon guarded against it? But perhaps he had—no doubt, indeed, he had taken precautions. Dominetti had simply got ahead of him.

"Drive past that way from here," he said to Ahmed. "In any case, there's nothing we can do. Ah, there's our man now! I'll give you the address when I land him safe."

A smartly turned out figure had turned the corner—the figure of an inspector of the Sûreté, in full uniform, carrying a parcel. Ahmed got behind the wheel, while Warden strode forward. At sight of him, Leblanc paused, then came on. He was a wide-shouldered little man, with enormous mustaches which lent him the deceptive air of fierceness so coveted by the hirsute Frenchman. Warden saluted him cheerily.

"Good morning, Inspector Leblanc! It is for you the car is waiting, no doubt?"

"But of a surety, yes," returned the officer, his eyes very sharp on Warden. "And you—"

"M. Warden, an American, a friend of M. Halsey," said Warden. "I'm to take you to Rue Theophile Gautier, *m'sieur.* May I relieve you of that package?"

"A thousand thanks." Leblanc was affable at once, and turned over the package to Warden as he entered the car. "You are, then, one of—"

"One of many," and Warden laughed. "Ahmed! To 42, Rue Theophile Gautier; pass by Rue Jasmin, and show M. Leblanc what has happened during the night."

As the car rounded into Rue Lafayette and headed for the Etoile, Leblanc turned in some surprise.

"What has happened? What mean you, *m'sieur?*"

"Another Fascist outrage," Warden

grinned. The other broke into a laugh of comprehension as he accepted a cigarette.

"So! That is interesting, very. These accursed Fascists! They have ruined Italy."

"Entirely," agreed Warden, keeping his gravity with an effort. "Poor Italy! You spent some years there, I believe?"

"Five years, *m'sieur*. My family is of Italian origin," said Leblanc.

Eying the package, Warden sniffed in contempt. It still bore the penciled name of the inspector—crude work! His disdain for these conspirators increased as he reflected on the ease with which he was handling this very ingenious but poorly managed murder plot. How Dominetti had attained such a terrible reputation was more than he could comprehend, if this affair were a sample of his work.

They bowled along at a fast pace through the Etoile and out toward Passy. Leblanc said nothing, but smoked in silence; from time to time he directed a quick glance toward Warden, as though puzzled by the activity of this American.

AT length they were descending the grade of Avenue Mozart, but on reaching Rue Jasmin, Ahmed merely turned in past the Metro entrance, then applied his brakes. Looking down the short street, all three men saw that it was blocked by a crowd and by fire apparatus. Where the laboratory had stood was now only a smoking heap of ruins, with two gaunt fragments of wall standing high in air.

"No use going on there, Ahmed," said Warden.

With a nod, the Arab swung around the Metro curb, crossed the avenue, and started down Rue Ribera. Then Leblanc pointed to a café at the far end of the little street.

"Before we go farther, my friend," he said, "let us stop there. To tell you the truth, I received the instructions rather late, and my *concierge* did not bring my morning coffee. A *café fine* would, I believe, materially assist the campaign."

"By all means!" said Warden affably. "Two, if you like!"

He gave Ahmed the order to halt at the café, and as they approached, saw that it was one of those places catering to the trade of taxi drivers—a *rendezvous des chauffeurs*. Three cars stood before it, and as the Hispano halted, Warden was not astonished to find four or five men clustered at the tiny bar inside. As he was opening the car door, Leblanc checked him.

"One instant, *m'sieur;* is it possible that you are aware of my errand?"

Warden nodded, as he met the dark, piercing eyes.

"But naturally," he returned. "If you have need of any assistance—"

"Oh, not at all! Come, then, let us descend."

They walked together into the café, the assembled chauffeurs eying the inspector with evident hostility. Leblanc passed to the rear end of the bar, and ordered a *café fine*, then turned to Warden with a slight smile beneath his huge mustache.

"You do not perceive the joke, *m'sieur?*"

"Eh?" Warden's brows lifted. "The joke? What joke?"

"Why, just this, *m'sieur!*" Leblanc grinned and dug an elbow into his ribs. "The excellent jest—the fact that you did not read the postscript to that letter, which was not written until later! I shall let you read it, presently."

And, as Warden was striving to comprehend the meaning of these words, as he was groping with startled senses for realization, as he became conscious of the malice and grinning triumph in the leering features of Leblanc—the sky fell upon him.

He reeled and dropped, not even hearing the swift, sharp scream of Ahmed, in the car outside.

CHAPTER XII.

A FOOL TOURIST.

WHEN Warden opened his eyes, he found himself tied very efficiently to a chair, and sitting in the back room of the café, as the casks and racked bottles testified. Two men in chauffeur's cap and dust-robe sat smoking languidly and regarding him, as they chatted in slang phrases.

"He's awake," said one. "Go tell the pretty officer."

The other slouched out, and in a moment Leblanc came into the room. He stopped, looked at Warden with a grin, and cocked his head on one side.

"Well, well! A good hit, Scorpion," he observed approvingly. "Didn't even draw blood, and yet it knocked him cold. You're an artist, my boy. So, M. Warden, you appreciate the nice little joke, eh? We'll have to let you read the postscript to that letter—here, it 'll keep you quiet while I go to knock off that rascally Russian. Give him a drink, one of you, and keep him quiet until I come back. Where's that chauffeur of his?"

"Emile took him and his car—drove off with him," said one of the two. "To Boulogne, I suppose."

Leblanc nodded. From inside his tunic he drew forth a letter, opened it, and spread it on a cask just to one side of Warden, so the latter could read it at leisure. Then, with a mocking salute, the inspector departed.

One of the two men came with a glass of vile cognac and held it to Warden's lips. The fiery stuff was invigorating; Warden's head cleared, despite the dull aching pain from the blow behind his ear, and he pulled himself together.

Fool that he was! Had the whole thing been a frame-up, then? He cast his eyes on the letter, and found it to be the same unfinished epistle that had lain on the table the preceding night. Now, however, it had been finished, with a postscript written in another hand. The words of it burned into Warden's brain:

> P.S. These orders have possibly been read by an American, one M. Warden; we cannot be certain of it. We have taken measures to safeguard yon in any emergency. If Coccini meets you in the morning, all is well. If Warden or another meets you, then take him to the café at the corner of Ribera and La Fontaine and he'll be attended to properly. We want to get hold of this Warden if possible. He is the kind to play a lone hand, so we may be able to gather him in and also dispose of the man Ivan.
>
> Dictated by the chief, taken down by E. C.

The "chief"—that must be Dominetti! Then the wily Italian must have come back to Paris during the night. Or else Glazunoff was the chief. Impossible to say.

Fool! Warden's eyes closed and he cursed himself and his folly bitterly. His scheme had been simple and good—to accompany Leblanc to his destination, then put a pistol to his head, identify himself to the Russian by means of the letter from Prince Sergei, have Leblanc collared by the police—a

full *exposé*, which would involve a police raid on the room in which Warden had made such astonishing discoveries.

Now, this was all wiped out. They had not been sure about his having entered that room, but they were taking no chances—and as a result, he had fallen slap into the pit which he himself had digged.

"I was pretty cocky, sure," thought Warden bitterly. "Took 'em for a pack o' fools. Huh! I walked right into their hands."

Well, it was done and no help for it. The most important thing of all was that June Tully was safe. She could not join North unless Ahmed took her to the café; Warden recalled now that he had only mentioned the place casually, depending on the Arab to take her there.

Thus, if Ahmed also had been trapped, as seemed most likely, June Tully could only remain at her hotel and await some word—and only Warden knew where she was.

THIS recollection made him twist in his seat, wrench at his bonds, uselessly. Luckily, he had given her what money he had—three or four thousand francs. The two men watching him grinned at his struggles, and one of them spoke mockingly.

"This bird has remembered something, what? Let's see what's on him, comrade. Emile got whatever pickings were on the chauffeur and the car—it's our turn to pluck this rooster while we have the chance."

The other nodded. Warden made no resistance, said nothing, as they came to him and went through his pockets. These words had shown him that Ahmed ben Zain was also trapped, and he knew the worst. There was only one streak of good luck in the whole wretched business—that impulse that had caused him to give June Tully the treaty.

Finding themselves only scantily rewarded for their work, the two grumbling rascals left Warden's papers alone, but took his other possessions and divided them, squabbling over his watch and scarf-pin and cigarette case.

"Skip with them," said the Scorpion, suddenly giving up the argument. "There's plenty of time before Leblanc can get back. Run down to the Chat Noir and sell the lot, and get back here; we'll divide the loot, and if you tell any lies about it I'll find them out. Then, if this bird squeals to Leblanc or the chief, we won't be caught with the goods."

"Brilliant, my old one!" was the response. "Back in half an hour."

The Scorpion was a man of fifty—a yellow-haired Norman, heavily built, crafty of eye, with a sour and greedy visage, but intelligent above the average of his ilk. His companion gone, he settled down to read a folded newspaper which he produced from his pocket.

"You're losing time," said Warden suddenly. The other looked up, scowled, then regarded him attentively. "True, I had no money on me—but money can be obtained, my friend. That is, in exchange for a service."

The Scorpion grimaced.

"No, no, my little one!" he growled. "Pinched you are, and pinched you stay. I have an unfortunate prejudice, me, against waking up in the morning to find a knife in my back, and St. Peter beckoning me forward."

Warden chuckled. "At least, give me a cigarette, and a cup of coffee. After all, we might do business."

"Not if it involves your liberty, my fat one! That's final."

The Scorpion rose and went into the café, returning with a glass of black coffee. This he aided Warden to drink, following it with a cigarette and a light. The man was avaricious enough, plainly so, but stood in healthy fear of his associates. Bribery might accomplish something, but winning freedom was out of the question.

"Come, let us consider the matter reasonably!" said Warden, between puffs. "You're a man of sense, and you know the certain advantage of having five thousand francs, cash, in your pocket. I can provide the cash, if you provide the pocket. Eh?"

The Scorpion folded up his newspaper, put it away, and chuckled.

"I like you, my American—what a pity that you're on the other side of the fence, you and your dollars!" he said. "I'd make some money out of you if I had the chance; but me, I do not like to take risks with our crowd, you comprehend."

"Naturally not," agreed Warden cheerfully. "You can't set me free; that's understood. However, there are other ways of earning money, less riskily. Let's see, now. What about the delivery of a letter at ten o'clock—in Boulogne?"

"Hm! All things are possible, with the saints aiding," said the Scorpion cautiously. "But in my estimation two letters are better than one."

"Why two?" asked Warden.

The other man grinned.

"The first, to deliver five thousand francs to bearer. The second—what you like."

WARDEN laughed, then reflected swiftly. North was undoubtedly, by this time, trailed by Dominetti's agents, therefore small harm would be caused by revealing his rendezvous. This rascal might never deliver the message at all—here was a risk that must be run. If he did deliver it, then much would be gained.

"Very well," said Warden. "Give me pencil and paper."

The Scorpion grunted. He produced a stub of pencil and a few sheets from Warden's own notebook, and laid them on the cask within reach. Then, passing behind Warden, he began to unfasten the knots of the rope.

"Don't turn around, my friend," he warned. "I'll be sitting in the corner behind you, and one move out of your easy chair will get you plugged."

"Right," said Warden, recognizing that the man would take no chances whatever if he made one false motion. Any attempt at escape would be rank folly.

He felt the rope loosen, and next moment his arms were free. He took pencil and paper and wrote two notes:

NORTH:

Pay the bearer five thousand francs for the delivery of a second message.

J. WARDEN.

NORTH:

Have been pinched with Ahmed. See that you don't make any mistakes likewise. If I don't return, I bequeath you my gold-headed cane and my debts; kindly pay my account at the Hôtel d'Angleterre. The bearer is a good fellow, but look out you don't meet him on a dark night.

WARDEN.

"All right," he said.

The Scorpion came up behind him. For an instant Warden considered taking a long chance, but one hand held a pistol to his neck while the other arranged the rope around his arms and drew it tight. Then, swiftly, the Scorpion took the rope in each hand and knotted it, and the chance was gone.

"Now let's see what we've produced," observed the hulking rascal, picking up the two notes. "This ought to beat the *Prix Goncourt*, eh? That is, for cash results. Hm!"

"You read English?" said Warden, seeing the Scorpion looking over the notes.

"Why not? Don't you read French, my little one? Well, these look all right to me—you're a smart one, and no mistake! Whatever you wanted to say, you've hidden it well. I don't think the chief would find this worth any five thousand balls."

"No," said Warden dryly. "He certainly wouldn't get anything out of it, so it 'll pay you to play straight with me. Who's the 'chief'—our friend Glazunoff?"

The Scorpion nodded, carefully folded the notes and pocketed them, then resumed his seat and his newspaper. So far as he was concerned, the affair was finished—except for the delivery of the notes. Warden described North, and gave the location of the café, and the Scorpion nodded again with great unconcern.

If the message were not delivered, no damage would be done. If North got it, he would at once seize on the mention of the Hôtel d'Angleterre—and a little investigation there would put him in touch with June Tully.

This much accomplished, Warden relaxed in his chair and breathed more freely. He now knew that Glazunoff wanted him alive and unhurt, probably for questioning, so he was in no immediate danger. The loss of the treaty would probably go undiscovered for some little time, and in any event June Tully would take care of it. If she failed to reach North, and if Warden did not return, she would probably take it to the Embassy herself.

"She will, too; she's the kind that doesn't need words of one syllable," thought Jimmy Warden. "So we might as well make the best of things and not worry. They've got me, but that doesn't mean they've won much!"

THE second man came stamping in, and jubilantly exhibited a sheaf of hundred-franc notes. A folding board and a pack of cards were produced from the front room, with another drink all around in which Warden was included most generously, and the two rascals settled down to pass the time comfortably and profitably.

"I came back by Rue Theophile Gautier," said the second man, as he shuffled the cards. "There was a crowd around Number 42, and Leblanc was strutting about with a gang of his accursed agents. He must have bumped off the old Russian neatly."

"He's a neat worker," commented the Scorpion. "But he knows too much. If he went against us, he could turn us all in."

"And if he did that, my old one," said the other complacently, "he'd have a knife sheathed in his belly inside of two hours—which he knows very well. So save your worry, and let's begin winning some of your money."

Warden's jaw set hard at this information. Prince Ivan murdered! And it was his own fault that the plot had been put through. He realized, bitterly enough, just what John Solomon had meant by his talk of "mistakes." If he had turned over his information promptly to the prefecture, instead of trying to play the game himself, then—

"Then I wouldn't be sitting here, and a better man would still be alive," he concluded morosely. "Wonder how long this will keep up?"

The same thought was in the mind of the Scorpion, who gestured to the prisoner.

"Any orders about him? What did Leblanc say?"

"Emile will bring back instructions," said the other carelessly. "Otherwise, we wait till Leblanc shows up."

"Well, I don't wait longer than nine, me," announced the Scorpion. "I have to pick up my accursed Englishman at nine, remember. He's too good a meal-ticket to lose."

The other gave him an envious look.

"You're a lucky dog, Scorpion! To have a fool of an English tourist engage you for three hours every morning, and at a flat rate, too! These English tourists don't tip. When you take this *saligaud* around and show him the sights and act as guide, and don't have to depend on an English tip, I call that luck!"

"You well may," said the Scorpion complacently, and twisted his mustache. "That's what comes of speaking English, my friend. He's a fool, like all Englishmen, but he pays well and asks only that I show up promptly and take him over a different route every morning. He lives in that *pension* up the street, and he has money, too. Well, to work!"

The precious pair fell to their game. Presently, at another interval, the second man gave the Scorpion a crafty look, and winked.

"You say this Rosbif is a fool, and has money? Listen, my old one! What's to hinder, eh? You and I—that is to say, if he carries enough to make it worth while—"

The Scorpion became vehement, incensed, furious.

"What, propose such a thing to me? Is it, then, that I am not a man of honor? Devil take you for a rogue! My Englishman drinks with me in cafés, I tell you. He trusts me. He is a fool, but he knows that I do not make a fool of him. Name of a dog! He's always buying a drink. He likes cafés, bars, every little rendezvous. True, he is an Englishman, but all the same we are friends. And my honor is my honor."

"Obviously," said the other with heavy sarcasm. "And you are touchy about it, eh?"

"Besides," went on the Scorpion, without heeding the interruption, "you remember that our instructions from the chief are very clear. We are to be ready for orders at all times, and we are not to engage in any little enterprise on our own hook. If we do, then we are lopped from the pay roll. It would not be wise to forget these instructions."

"That is true," said the other more soberly. "But when I see some of these tourists and how they disregard good money—I tell you, my mouth waters!"

"Wipe it on your cuff, then, and get on with the game," said the Scorpion rudely.

THE game progressed, while Warden sat watching the two men. His bonds were not too tight, and he was in no great discomfort except from the blow behind his ear, which had caused a blinding, swirling headache.

He perceived that these men and their recent companions were, so to speak, on the outskirts of Dominetti's "mob." Probably they had never even heard the name of Dominetti. They were used for such purposes as the present one, looked up to Glazunoff as the *patron* or boss, and were very little,

if at all, acquainted with the general business of Dominetti and his agents. Except for the salient fact that they had a most healthy fear of getting a knife in the back.

Suddenly there came interruption—a voice from the café.

"Name of a name! Where's every one, Ignace?"

"In the back room," was the response.

The card game instantly ceased. The two players exchanged a significant glance and swept out of sight the piles of blue and yellow bank notes. Evidently they did not care to have their wealth observed.

A man strode in, leaving the swinging door half ajar. The Scorpion looked around.

"So, Emile!" he exclaimed. The newcomer was, like the others, an obvious chauffeur. "You landed that fellow, eh? No trouble?"

"Not a bit." Emile turned toward the outer room. "Ignace! Give us a *fine* all around! And honest Martell, too; none of your rot-gut! I've got the cash, me."

"Then you'd better split with us," suggested the Scorpion. "You got some pickings from that car, did you? Excellent."

"Go to the devil," said Emile, with a glance at Warden. "You've got the pickings off this bird, so forget it. No, no! *Ta bouche, toi!*" he cried furiously, as the Scorpion seemed about to argue the matter. "Forget it! We draw a hundred francs each for the job. One of us has to stay here with this chicken until noon, and gets an extra hundred. The chief will send for him at noon. Now, then, which of us gets the extra hundred?"

"I'm out of it," said the Scorpion, with a shrug. "I've got my steady—three days, now, I've run this Englishman around, and he stays for another three weeks at least. Me, I stick to him."

"Then we'll draw cards for it," said Emile to the third man, who readily assented.

The cards were spread out, with much wrangling and furious discussion in the eloquent and passionate Gallic manner. The proprietor, Ignace, entered with a tray of drinks and stood looking on with interest; he was a big fellow with a scarred chin and curled mustaches. At length it was settled, Emile winning the lucrative honor of remaining as Warden's guard until noon.

Another man came stamping in and joined the party. He, too, was a chauffeur, and ordered a drink added to those on the tray. Ignace went to fetch it.

"WELL, Leblanc turned the trick like a good one," announced the new arrival, in a low voice. "I was just up there and stopped for a bit of talk. They say he plumped two slugs into the old Russian. Wish he'd do it to every damned Russian taxi driver in the city! An honest Frenchman hasn't a chance to make a living these days, what with Russians and Serbians and these cursed—"

"Get to business, now!" growled the Scorpion. "What happened up there?"

"Search me, little one. It seems the old Russian was caught with forged notes; or they were found. He drew a gun and Leblanc popped him off. That bird probably planted the forged notes; remember the package he was carrying?" The speaker grinned. "Clever fellow, Leblanc! He'll draw down a fat wad from the chief for

this job, and from the other side he'll get promotion and what not! That's working it both ways, eh? Ignace! Where's that cognac?"

Ignace came in, leaving the door ajar. The outer room was empty.

The men stood about, sipping their cognac and discussing Leblanc's cleverness. Warden was given a drink with the others—and he did not miss the appraisal in their eyes, the lack of humor, the half-pitying manner. They had no fear of talking freely before him. They were quite certain as to his ultimate disposition, evidently.

So interested grew the discussion that none of them heard a step in the other room, or a voice lifted in English.

"Dang it! Ain't there no one around?"

Warden stiffened. Impossible! Yet he seemed to recognize that voice. The speaker rapped on the bar with his knuckles. The Scorpion looked around through the doorway, then sprang to his feet.

"Name of a name—it is my Englishman!... 'Allo zere, my friend! I am coming, me!"

He started for the doorway. There, however, looking in upon the room, stood a pudgy little figure, whose blue eyes rested blankly upon Warden for an instant—checking with their lack of all recognition the cry that came to the American's lips. Then the Scorpion caught the little man by the arm and propelled him out of sight.

"Zis is ze good luck, my friend!" came his voice. "I was on ze point of going to your *pension.* Come, ze old bus is here outside. But we will not drink in zis place. It is no good—"

The voices died out, and they were gone. But, for an instant, John Solomon had stood there looking in upon the back room—John Solomon, the "fool English tourist" who was the Scorpion's meal ticket!

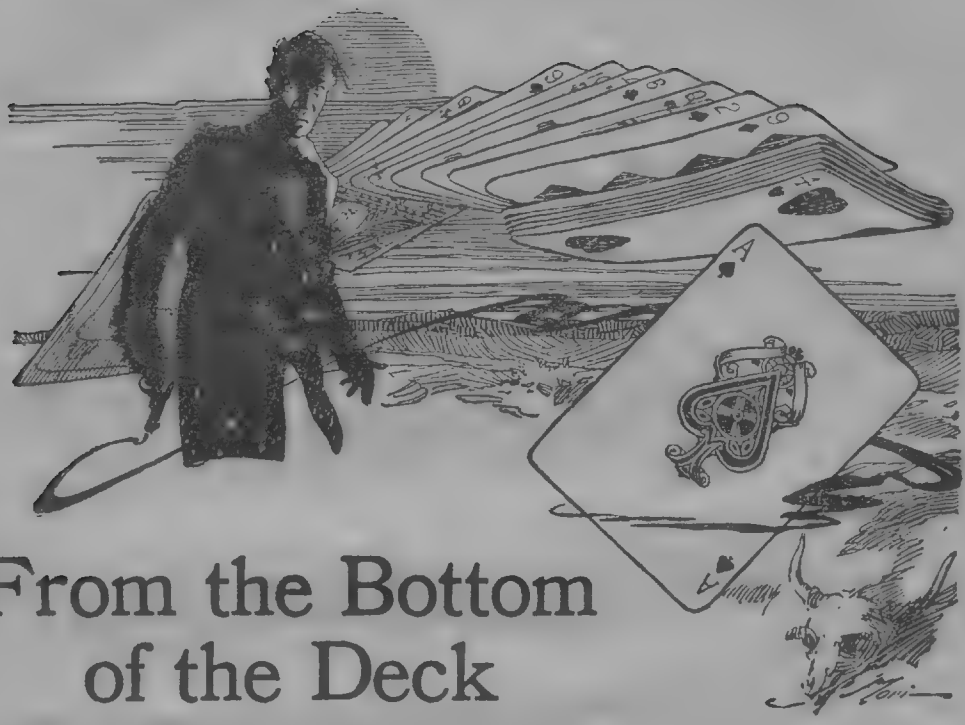
TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Mudholes for Rent

THE Chinese farmer in the Yangtze valley rents out his mudholes and ponds at a profit every season. These ponds are kept filled all summer by the heavy monsoon rains, and every year or so the farmer digs them out afresh and carries the soil back onto his fields. A fish company or syndicate rents the ponds for a dollar or so for the season and stocks them with carp in the spring. The carp are fingerlings, three or four inches long that have been grown in a nursery, and as many as three or four hundred are put in every pond.

The carp are fed during the summer with grain, and in addition have the food which flows into the ponds with each rain. At the beginning of winter the fish are seined out. They then weigh a couple of pounds and are sent off to market, fresh, dried, smoked, or cured as the case may be.

Wyman Sidney Smith.



From the Bottom of the Deck

The white hands of gambler "Ladyfinger" Brown were deft and sure—but it takes a very clever man to cheat the Western desert

By NEIL T. McMILLAN

"MISTER, them's some of the slickest cuss words I ever heard. You shore possess learnin' and no mistake."

"Ladyfinger" Brown stopped his mad cursing and stared, half-fearful that this dust-covered rider with the freshly shaven yet weather-used face was only another illusion of the shimmering heat waves of the prairie. Then he slowly dragged his long body from the doubtful shade of a soapweed and put out a hand. The horse was real.

"Water!" he begged. "For God's sake, give me water!"

"Shore, he'p yourself," the old man replied and unslung a canteen.

Ladyfinger drank greedily, until a hairy hand jerked the canteen away.

"Not too much, stranger, all at once—you look purty far gone. How did you happen to be out here with nary a horse, nor a hat, and with them dude clothes and no-'count shoes on?"

The tepid water had brought back something of Ladyfinger's consciousness and cunning.

"I was riding to Calientes," he lied, "when my horse threw me. I lost my hat, and I was trying to find the town on foot. It must be farther than I thought."

"I reckon it is, seein' from your tracks that you was goin' the wrong way."

"Was I?" Ladyfinger asked and widened his eyes.

"You know dang well you was,"

the rider said suddenly. "Mister, I've got my suspicions that you was a leavin' Calientes and not a goin' thar. Them white fingers o' yours never did belong to nobody but a perfessional g a m b l e r; and I've heard ol' Jim Dayton, what runs the Desert Thirst Saloon, swear many a time that if ever he caught a perfessional gambler a cheatin' in his place he'd set him out in the desert on foot. The only thing that don't hitch up is that I can't see no gun on you, and Jim always said he'd give the pore feller a gun with jest one cartridge in it to finish hisself with when the heat began to send him loco."

Ladyfinger's eyes narrowed.

"I tell you I was riding to Calientes and my horse threw me."

"All right, mister, all right—I'll give you the benefit o' the doubt. Reckon ol' Thunderbolt can carry double for a spell. Jest git up behind me and—you blamed fool! Ain't you got no better sense than to try and git on from that side? Git around here."

Ladyfinger, with the slinking movement of a cat, walked to the horse's tail. When squarely behind the old man's back, he slipped his hand into his shirt, drew his small pistol—the pistol with but one cartridge in it—and taking careful aim, fired.

"POP" HORTON watched a dust cloud approach the parched, sunburned town of Calientes and resolve itself into a stagecoach that drew up with a rattle and screeching of brakes before the Desert Thirst Saloon. He watched until it had disgorged its dust-covered passengers, and then approached the driver who had allowed tobacco juice to form twin streaks of mud from the corners of his mouth.

"Say!" Pop asked him. "You ain't seen nothin' of a lousy, flea-bitten ol' desert rat anywheres along the road, have you?"

From his high seat the driver looked anxiously over Pop's head at the door of the saloon. The bartender, in a dirty apron, emerged with a brimming glass.

In one motion, the driver spat out his tobacco and reached for the glass. With a sigh of satisfaction he gulped the contents, returned the glass, wiped his mouth with the back of a hand, and asked: "What was that you was sayin, ol'-timer?"

"I was askin'," Pop replied, "had you seen my pardner, maybe? I been waitin' for him to come to town so's him and me could have a drink or two. I been a settin' over thar in that general store where thar ain't nothin' wet, till I'm plumb calloused. The ornery ol' son-of-a-walrus ought to been here long ago."

"What does this pard o' yours look like?"

"Well, he's long and lanky, he's got stick-out ears, and more'n likely he wouldn't have no whiskers, 'cause that's why I got to town ahead o' the ol' fool. You see he thinks he's a dude, and he had to stop at the last water hole to shave. And he got his fancy vest and his fancy boots offen his jack 'fore I left him. You ain't seen nothin' of an ol' dude, without no whiskers and a wearin' a fancy vest and boots and a ridin' a bony ol' nag, have you?"

"No," said the driver, "but I did find a lanky, smooth-faced fellar, without a vest, nor boots, nor horse, a kickin' his last in the dust o' the road."

Something went cold inside of Pop.

"Whar?" he asked in apprehension.

"'Bout three miles back."

"Gawd!" Pop whispered, "that

would be jest 'bout where he'd hit the road. Mister, please—jest what did this fellar look like?"

"You can see for yourself, he's tied to the back o' the stage."

With fear weighting his feet, Pop moved slowly around the big wheels and stared. He put out a hesitant hand and turned the face of the dead man toward him. The driver followed him, bit off a corner of a plug of tobacco and asked, "Is it him?"

Pop whirled on him.

"Who done it?"

The driver shrugged his shoulders, moved the chew into his cheek and drawled; "Damned if I know. Greaser, probably."

Pop rubbed the sudden tears from his eyes, jerked down his hat brim to cover his grief, hitched his gun belt and muttered; "I'll git whoever done it. I'll git him if I have to foller him clear to the end o' the world!"

"All alone?"

"You're damn' right!" Pop said with a vigorous nod. "No sheriffs nor rangers for me. I'll git him!"

"Maybe there's more'n one," the driver suggested.

Pop's fingers closed over the worn butt of his six-gun. "Don't care—I'll git 'em all!"

The driver shrugged his shoulders again. "Well, good luck to you, ol'-timer."

Pop turned and walked off.

"Say!" the driver called after him. "What'll we do with your pard?"

Pop looked back at him.

"Bury him. I ain't got time."

POP walked to the general store and from the backs of two loaded burros, his and his partner Jim's, he took enough supplies to last him a week. He opened his six-gun, examined the cartridge in each chamber minutely, swung into his saddle and took the hot road from town.

Three miles out he found the telltale marks where the stage had stopped and many feet had gathered around a fallen man. Pop followed the broad, bloodstained track the man had made in crawling and saw where Jim had fallen from his horse. There he found other marks, the marks made by a man in shoes who had been wandering aimlessly on foot and had laid down behind a soapweed. The trail of Jim's horse led north. Pop followed it.

The rest of that day, while the heat devils danced on every hill, he rode beside this trail. When it grew too dark to see, he turned abruptly to the right and unerringly made his way to the water hole that he and Jim had left early that morning.

While it was still dark in the early hours of the next day he left the water hole and at dawn again picked up the trail of the murderer. At noon he muttered; "He kept a goin' all night." Pop did not rest, but kept pushing northward, while the merciless sun beat down upon him. Toward evening he came upon the place where the tracks of his quarry met other tracks, those of a horse and burro.

"Met up with another desert rat," Pop concluded, "and they shore did a heap o' movin' around."

He looked down hopelessly at the multitude of imprints, and then riding out from them a few yards, made a circle until he found where the sharp heels of Jim's stolen boots had sunk into the sand beside the hoof marks of Jim's stolen horse. The heel prints ended abruptly where the wearer of the boots had mounted, and Pop again took up the trail.

"He's found out where thar's a

water hole, now, and he's headin' straight for it. Reckon that'll he'p me. I can keep a goin' after dark till I git thar."

In the smudged light of another dawn Pop left his horse and made his cautious way toward the water hole.

"The blamed fool's got hisself a fire. Reckon he thinks nobody's a follerin' him."

He crawled the last few feet, and removing his headgear, looked over the rim. A man wearing Jim's hat was squatting over a buffalo-chip fire. Pop trained his gun upon him, then snapped:

"Throw up your hands, you yellow skunk!"

The man straightened suddenly, slowly raised his hands, faced Pop, and then exploded in wrath:

"This is shore gittin' to be one hell of a country! A peace-lovin' man can't go about his business without some hombre comin' along an' a stickin' a gun in his face."

Pop gulped in surprise. The voice was that of harmless old Beansoup Jake.

For a long minute of hesitation Pop waited, but hardened as he saw the light of the fire playing on the fancy vest and boots of his murdered partner.

"I suppose I ought to give you a chance to git your gun, but I ain't."

"Pop Horton!" Jake exclaimed. "I'd know that voice anywheres. Since when have you turned bad man?"

"I reckon you know why I'm a goin' to shoot you," Pop replied. "You killed my partner Jim."

"I ain't killed no—" Jake began and suddenly stopped in shocked thought. "So that's what that feller done! I ought to have knowed that hoss and these clothes. The dirty coyote!"

"What dirty coyote you mean?" Pop asked.

"That feller I met up with yesterday," Jake answered. "He stuck a gun in my back and made me change clothes and hosses with him. And he took my jack, loaded with the dust I had dug over in the Mad River Mountains; and the yellow devil stole every drop o' water I had. That's how come I had to come to this water hole."

"You're purty smart!" Pop replied. "But it don't go. You murdered Jim yourself."

"If that's what you think for shore," Jake said in a low voice, "jest go ahead and shoot."

Pop's thumb and forefinger twitched on the hammer and trigger of his gun, while he tried—in vain—to believe that Jim's murderer stood before him. Disappointment welled up in him as he slipped his gun into its holster and walked to the fire just as the sun's edge peeked over the horizon.

"Jake, I'm plumb sorry. Jest what did this feller look like and whar was he a goin'?"

"He's a slick-lookin' hombre," Jake replied, "with white hands that never belonged to a man o' this country. 'Fore he jammed his gun in my back he wanted to know whar was the nearest town, and I told him 'bout Calientes and Windy City."

"It'll be Windy City he'll try to hit," Pop concluded. "Reckon he won't think he's welcome 'round Calientes. Well, so long!"

"Better wait for a bite to eat," Jake invited.

"Cain't," Pop replied. "That feller's made me lose too much time a'ready. *Adios,* Jake! I'm shore glad it wasn't you."

"Listen, Pop—don't forget my dust, if you find him!" Pop heard

Jake calling after him. "You can tell him by them white hands."

THE sweating bartenders of the Hurricane Saloon of Windy City worked busily behind the counter preparing for an expected inrush of well-moneyed customers. A boy shuffled across the uneven floor, dragging and pushing chairs into place, and wiping the tops of the tables with his apron.

Ladyfinger Brown, in his own clothes, with clean linen, freshly shaven and with his hands again immaculate, sat just outside the circle of light cast by an overhead oil lamp at the farthest table.

To-night, he had been assured, the employees of two ranches would be riding in with their month's pay upon them. To-night he would make his big winning from these accursed Westerners, and in the morning he would leave on the weekly stage that would carry him a thousand miles—back to the boats of the river where life was comfortable, where suckers were not as quick to grow suspicious, and where one was not set out on blistering deserts, afoot.

Ladyfinger closed his eyes. In fancy he could feel the boat quivering from the engines, could hear the splashing under the slow wheels, could smell the moist air, heavy with the warm odors of the water and the tree-covered banks—and could thrill to the pleasure of taking big money from the passengers.

His long fingers toyed, caressing the cards before him as he dreamed. There was a slight noise, and he opened his eyes. An old man with bloodshot, sleepless eyes was staring at his hands. Ladyfinger smiled engagingly.

"Sit down and let's start a little game."

"Well, I don't mind if I set awhile, but I ain't hankerin' to play. I was jest a lookin' for a feller."

"Don't you play poker?" Ladyfinger asked in his best voice, as the newcomer pulled out a chair and sat down.

"Nope!"

Ladyfinger raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"That's unusual. Do you play any game?"

"Nope, I don't do nothin' with cards but tell fortunes."

Ladyfinger looked about the room. It seemed likely that no victims of his guile would be ready for some time. Here was a pleasant way to spend an hour till they came; he would ask the old man to read the cards for him. Perhaps he would see big winnings on the river.

"Will you read my fortune?"

"Shore, I ain't got nothin' else to do. Hand 'em over."

Ladyfinger lighted a cigar and puffed languidly while the obliging ancient pawed through the cards with gnarled fingers, threw out several of the lower of each suit, and shuffled the deck.

"Now then, pard, jest cut 'em three times toward you and make a wish."

Ladyfinger silently wished that the morrow would find him on his way to the river and cut the cards as directed. The fortune teller turned each pile face upward, regarded them thoughtfully, and announced:

"You ain't goin' to git your wish."

Ladyfinger smiled whimsically; "I'm not?"

"Nope, that's certain. I don't know what you wished but you ain't goin' to git it, whatever it was."

Slowly the old man laid the cards in rows and studied them. He looked up and gazed into Ladyfinger's eyes with

a steadiness that Ladyfinger did not like.

"'Pears like you must o' killed an ol' man right recent."

A superstitious chill went over Ladyfinger. Was that in the cards? He knew the old man before him read the truth in his eyes, but he attempted to laugh it off and said: "You missed it that time!"

"Nope, I didn't miss it. The cards don't lie. See that ace o' spades, upside down? That's the death card, an' it's right whar that king is a facin' it. That means an ol' man met death. And see the jack next to it? That's you and that means that you must o' killed him."

Ladyfinger drew in a long breath of smoke and exhaled it.

"It's interesting to see how far off you are. Go on."

LADYFINGER thought he detected hatred in the old man's eyes as he gathered up the cards, shuffled them and began to lay them in rows again. As before, he studied them a moment before speaking.

"'Pears like thar's another ol' man, a pardner of the one you killed, a follerin' you. Looks like he had a peck o' trouble keepin' your trail 'count o' you coverin' it up. Looks like he'd chased the wrong man for awhile and almost killed him, which was what you was aimin' he ought to do. But this wrong man was a friend o' his, and he give him a purty good ideer o' what you looked like. Yep, and it looks like this ol' man was a goin' to git you; 'cause the ace o' spades is camped right next to you."

"Which card is the old man?" Ladyfinger inquired.

"The king o' hearts, right thar."

Ladyfinger reached out his left hand for the ace of spades; and while the old man's attention was fixed on the card, slipped his pistol from its holster with his right hand. Under the table he pressed the muzzle against the other's knee.

"I happened to see you deal this card from the bottom of the deck. It would have been all right if you had put it where it belongs. It should be here."

He placed it over the king of hearts.

The old man's eyes narrowed.

"You better shoot me now, man, 'cause if you don't I'll git you. Ol' Pop Horton 'll git the coyote that killed his pard, an' no mistake."

It was in Ladyfinger's mind to let the old man have it, but that might be suicide. He did not know how the inhabitants of the town might react; then too, he must make a cleaning to-night; and he must wait until morning for the stage that would carry him the thousand miles to the river. He spoke softly.

"Unbuckle your gun belt."

For a long minute the old man glared at him, and then did as commanded.

"Now then, stand up. Listen! I don't want to ever see you again. If I do, you'll meet your pardner in hell. Now travel!"

As the old man walked slowly away, Ladyfinger reached under the table, seized the gun belt and its heavy burden and threw it behind him against the wall.

THE suckers drifted in and soon Ladyfinger had six men to play with around the table. He smoked two cigars while he slowly but surely increased the pile of chips before him, losing occasionally to allay suspicion. At frequent intervals he let his eyes

roam about the saloon, searching for the old man who had promised to "git him." For two hours he did not see him. The gambler concluded that the threat had been only a bluff and that he need have no fear.

He was dealing and smoking his third cigar when Pop returned to stand in the outer door. Ladyfinger's quick eyes noted that the old man had procured another gun. So that was why he had been absent!

The gambler glanced about the table to note with satisfaction that seated as he was, with his back to the wall, there was no angle from which the old man could shoot without bringing a fellow player into the line of fire.

Ladyfinger laid down the deck and exulted. This would be the hand on which he would make the big cleaning. Having seen the tiny marks on the other cards as he had dealt them, he knew that a full house with aces high would beat anything that the others would be likely to hold. He needed one card to complete his hand, and that card he knew was on the bottom of the deck.

As he picked up the cards to deal those called for, he glanced at the door. The old man was gone.

"Gimme two."

"Gimme three."

"I'll take four."

Ladyfinger complied with the requests around the table. Sudden intuition caused him to look over his shoulder. A window was at his back. In a startled second he realized why the old man had left the door. He fumbled as he dealt to himself from the bottom of the deck, and the ace of spades fell face upward on the table before him.

With a quick apology he picked it up and laid down the deck.

"Jest a minute, stranger," a heavy voice drawled, and Ladyfinger looked into the hard eyes of the cow-puncher opposite him. "I happened to see where you got that card."

Ladyfinger did not make the mistake of waiting. He drew and fired.

The suddenness of it helped him. Almost before his accuser had time to sprawl across the table in the clutching throes of death, Ladyfinger had bolted to the street.

He sprang upon the back of the first horse, fired at the open doorway, and dug his heels into the horse's flanks. A shot came from behind the saloon. The gambler turned in his saddle, returned it, and clattered away into the starlit night, cursing aloud.

Three mornings later, after having dared to sleep the night before, Ladyfinger left his mount at the foot of a prairie slope and cautiously made his way to the summit. Two miles back over the way he had come he saw a lone rider. Only one? He smiled sardonically and ambushed himself behind a clump of soapweed.

The rider came on until just out of pistol range at the bottom of the hill. Ladyfinger could see that it was the ancient who had called himself Pop Horton. The old man stopped, looked up and then turned to ride around the hill. Swearing fervently, Ladyfinger backed away and ran to his horse.

Three times that day the gambler purposely made his trail over small hills and lay in wait behind them, only to see the wary Westerner each time refuse to walk into the trap.

AS the sun was sinking below the distant rim of the mountains, Ladyfinger rode down a slope to the cottonwoods that fringed the bank of a prairie stream, which in this place

showed a trickle of water on the surface. His tired body cried for rest, but the fear of the pursued drove him downstream.

Where the water left the surface and resumed its course underground, the cottonwoods ended abruptly. Ladyfinger kept on across the naked prairie while the day faded and darkness came on. In the silent blackness, miles farther, he stopped and looked back. A faint glow shone on the distant cottonwoods. His pursuer had stopped to build a fire.

Full-fledged, a vengeful plan leaped into Ladyfinger's brain, and he turned his horse around to ride back to the fire.

A quarter of a mile from the trees, Ladyfinger left his horse and crept carefully up the hill. At the crest he lay flat and surveyed the scene before him. The tiny fire flickered fitfully in the wind, its shadows dancing over a still, blanket-wrapped form. The gambler waited cautiously for year-long minutes. The figure did not move.

The prowler slipped his gun from its holster, and rising to his feet, hurried down the slope in a crouching run. Hearing a sharp snort of alarm, he dropped to his belly behind the sagebrush. Silhouetted against the stars he could make out the horse of his pursuer, head up, listening. Ladyfinger watched the form beside the fire for signs of awakening. Fortunately there were none.

Unheedful of the animal's alarm, he made his way, hugging the ground, to another bush but ten yards from the fire. Then, while he held his breath, he laid the barrel of his gun over his arm, sighted accurately and pressed the trigger again and again and again.

Six reports startled the night. Ladyfinger saw with intense satisfaction that the flashes from his gun streaked into the blankets. The figure rolled slightly and grew still.

"Ace of spades was mine, was it?" he said softly. "Wonder what you think about it now on your way to hell."

Careless of showing himself, he rose from his hiding place and walked boldly to the fire. He prodded the figure with his foot. It was suspiciously hard. With a swift motion he stooped and threw back the blankets. The light of the flames played on a cottonwood log.

Even as he straightened, fire leaped out of the night and a report that he never heard lost itself in the far reaches of the prairie. Out of the blackness there came a whisper. "Jim, ol' pard, I got 'im!"

THE END.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Beyond the Law," "Glamour of Gold," "Looters' Luck," etc.

J. ALLAN DUNN has adventure in his blood. He has wandered across the globe, led on by restless curiosity; he has poked into the world's strangest corners, he has sailed into unknown ports. He is always looking for the new and the mysterious.

He's been an artist and a rancher, a miner and a horse wrangler, a pearler, a windjammer's skipper, a war correspondent, a sugar planter, a prospector and an author. In the course of his travels he has been pretty well shot through with lead and steel; and he's enjoyed bubonic plague, cholera, and some of the other choice fevers that come out of the tropics.

Mr. Dunn was born in London, England, of Irish parents. That's probably where he got his magical gift for story telling. He went to Oxford University, and then spent several years traveling through Europe and along the African fringe of the Mediterranean. One day he sailed to India, and, returning, went back across the Equator to South Africa.

He felt the lure of western horizons about that time, and took a steamer for the United States. He finally hit Colorado and tried his hand there at mining and ranching. Hard luck trailed him, however; probably it was fortunate, because Dunn pulled stakes and looked for new worlds. Down in New Mexico he lived through enough thrilling experiences to satisfy any ordinary man for a lifetime.

He decided to withdraw momentarily from an adventurer's career, and joined the Salt Lake *Herald* as a reporter. But the Spanish-American war broke out about then, and J. Allan Dunn couldn't resist the lure of danger. They sent him to Cuba to cover the war.

In tropical Cuba he discovered that a war can be more hard work than glamour. He had to hike twenty-two miles every day between the battle front and the cable office in Siboney, where he sent out dispatches to the papers. There was only one cable going out of Siboney, he relates, and the war correspondents used to toss for turns. Unlucky ones had to sit up until three in the morning to get their stories through.

When the war was over, wanderlust took Dunn to California and to Honolulu. Tall tales of fortunes in pearls in the South Seas sent him down there. Pearling, he discovered, was a lottery. "I lost," he admits, "but I had a good time."

He explored New Guinea, that strange land north of Australia where head hunters still roam and death waits for the white man who is bold enough to pierce into the cannibal-inhabited interior. Dunn came out with his head, and his life, happily. He bought a barkentine and sailed up the Yangtze-kiang, and about then another war broke out and gave him an excuse to wander in another strange country.

That was the Russo-Jap war. He covered it for the duration. His side-kick was Jack London. J. Allan Dunn traveled with another man the world well remembers, when he was in the tropics—the famous Richard Harding Davis.

Dunn has made many unique business adventures. Among other things, he has prospected for gold in the Klondike and tried to run a sugar plantation in Hawaii. The only thing that ever paid him, he says, is writing.

He has written almost two thousand short stories, numberless novelettes, and between twenty and thirty serials.

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

THE lesser of two evils, Mr. Eldridge thought ARGOSY, but—

Fort Worth, Texas.

This is a phlegmatic way for a reader of ARGOSY to start a letter to the editor, but—

I began reading ARGOSY years ago, quite by accident. Being on a none too promising or enthusiastic train trip and depressed, I thought possibly a magazine would make the journey a little more endurable.

Rather unusual—but the news butcher's stock was very much depleted. ARGOSY and the *Woman's Home Companion* comprised the entire stock. I took the lesser, of what I thought then were two evils. Should I add that I have been a habitual addict since?

I enjoy most every story I read in ARGOSY. They are unusual, excellently written, long enough to make them interesting and fast moving enough to make them exciting. Some of the plots would make Scott, Poe, Arlen, Van Vechten, Hecht and others look to their laurels. The surprising part of it is, how can this type of fiction be sold for ten cents and not be crowded out of the magazine with advertisements?

As publicity director for my firm I suppose that I am like the sailor that takes a row on the lake for amusement on his off hours or the motorman that takes a trolley ride, but most of my idle hours are spent with the *Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the *Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, *Condi*, ARGOSY and other good books.

It is needless emphasis to say that H. Bedford-Jones is your best writer, and you have some splendid ones.

G. D. ELDRIDGE, JR.

THIRTY years with ARGOSY—and still satisfied:

Hopkins, S. C.

This month rounds out my thirty years of reading ARGOSY. I have stuck to it in all its changes, and expect to continue.

As a whole it is the best all around magazine I have ever been able to discover. It is better of late than it has been in several years. Of course, there are some of the stories I do not care for, which is only natural, I think.

I especially like MacIsaac, Seltzer, Cummings, Lynde, Stribling and quite a few others.

I have all copies of ARGOSY from 1900 to the present. If any readers lack some numbers, perhaps I could supply them.

J. P. GARICK.

A VERY nicely expressed appreciation of "The Ship of Ishtar" is this:

Cincinnati, Ohio.

My reading of the ARGOSY began, in a way, with numbers printed before I was born because, as soon as I was able to read, I devoured the back numbers which had accumulated in our house for several years. I also was a reader of the old *All Story-Cavalier*, later known only as the *All Story Weekly*, which was combined with the ARGOSY. A few years ago, however, your stories began to tire me, and I stopped reading the magazine. This week I happened to buy your issue for January 11, in which Milton L. Keyes of East Boston, Massachusetts, mentions the "Ship of Ishtar." The mention of this story is responsible for this letter.

"The Ship of Ishtar," says Mr. Keyes, is the best story written in any language. Although I do not go so far in my praise as Mr. Keyes; I agree with him that it was a remarkable story. As a romantic novel it is an exquisite reproduction of the spirit of the romantic movement of the last century, whose ideals are best explained in the frequently quoted words of Tieck.

"Mondbeglänzte Zaubernacht,
Die den Sinn gefangen hält,
Wundervolle Märchenwelt,
Steig auf in der alten Pracht!"

The melancholy beauty which pervades "The Ship of Ishtar," the colors of that sapphire sea, the supernatural ship with its strange cargo of good and evil warring together, the strange cities dimly described yet intuitively understood, the love affair, which is not of this world and brings with it inevitable but glorious death—all this is truly romantic. And the language in which these fairy situations are bathed is as beautiful and gently flowing as the waters of the sapphire sea itself. In these

days, when literature is mostly realistic and the magazines of the people, of which yours is one of the prominent ones, are applying themselves to the kiss-and-get-married type of literature, popularly called romantic, a gem like this story is a rarity.

RALPH WOOD.

ALONG comes another Cummings champion:

Minneapolis, Minn.

There has been a great deal of criticism of Ray Cummings recently; therefore I wish to put in a good word for him. I have enjoyed every one of his stories and am patiently waiting for his next one; that is, I'm trying to be patient.

Kline made a great start with his "Planet of Peril," but he raised himself up with Farley, Burroughs and Cummings with his "Maza of the Moon."

LEVERN LARSON.

AND another:

Rochester, N. Y.

I have been a reader of the ARGOSY for about six years and have enjoyed it very much.

I also enjoy the "Argonotes."

Ray Cummings is my favorite author, and when people start throwing bricks at him, so to speak, it is time I said something. One writer said his stories were impossible. Well, all I have to say to that is, so were the automobile and airplane thought impossible at one time, to say nothing of radio and most everything of an electrical nature.

Otis Kline's last story, "Maza of the Moon," was very good.

HORACE G. LOWEY.

THREE times opportunity has knocked for this reader—until at last he is convinced:

New York City.

Not many years ago, when I was in my senior year in a New York high school, I had my first run-in with the ARGOSY magazine. A fellow student, who had just finished reading his copy of the ARGOSY, presented it to me while I was racking my brains over *Richelieu* in the school library. A librarian, prominently known to this day as a nag, approached me and gave me a bawling-out on what books I should peruse. An assistant principal, hearing this, came to me, took the book from the librarian and glanced at the brilliant cover. To my utter surprise he said: "It's all right, Miss ———; I had it in mind to tell you to add this every week to our magazine department. I read it myself." I enjoyed that. After that term I graduated, incidentally, forgot the ARGOSY.

Three years later, I was a junior attending the University of Alabama and was a halfback on the eleven. It was December 8, I think, that we were scheduled to oppose Georgia Tech. The year before we had lost by a great margin and this time we were determined to win. To my flustration, I was picked to do most of the receiving. Yes, I was nervous—and how! It was not until the coach tossed me a magazine—ARGOSY—that I quit my nervousness. A few hours later, marooning me in the middle of a football story, I was called out to play. I am proud to say that I was instrumental in Alma Mater's gridiron success. Honors went to my head and for the second time I forgot my impromptu savior.

At present I am a reporter on a metropolitan daily in this city, doing my best to feed the gourmand—my city editor—enough news to choke him. Not more than a month before, I was sent to cover a blaze in the upper Bronx. I arrived in time, received all the particulars and then rushed up to the unlucky part of the building. In one apartment where I took a photo I found a half burned copy of the ARGOSY lying on a charred escritoire. The cover was almost entirely consumed by flames, but not enough to efface "Cyrano" by H. Bedford-Jones.

Three omens are enough. I have not missed an issue since.

RICHARD MALWYN.

THIS reader may be a young one, but he knows what he likes:

Denison, Texas.

I am only fifteen years old, but I have been reading the ARGOSY ever since I can remember, and I sure do like it. I have just finished Otis Adelbert Kline's "Maza of the Moon." Boy, that was *some* story! I liked it so well that I saved all the installments and am making a book out of them. Next to Kline I like Wirt and Cummings. Others can talk about Cummings's stories being impossible, but that's the way I like them. I also liked "The Darkness on Fifth Avenue," and its sequel "The City of the Blind." Let's have another of Wirt's China stories soon.

JOHN REID COMPTON.

NOW for a few favorite stories:

Los Angeles, Cal.

The ARGOSY lately has been just great. I certainly enjoy Fred MacIsaac's stories. "The Mental Marvel" and "Run, Dan, Run!" were simply great. "Death's Domain," "A Reptile

Named Robard," "He'd Be His Own Son," "The Planet of Peril," "Princess of the Atom" and "Cyrano" were also fine.

At the present time I am reading Otis Adelbert Kline's story "Maza of the Moon," which promises to be a great novel.

KENNARD D. MOORE.

ANOTHER reader takes sides with John Wilstach in his recent discussion:

Philadelphia, Pa.

For over fifteen years a reader of your wonderful magazine, may I say a few words?

First of all, I've yet to find a magazine that could ever compare with yours. Second, that I believe A. W. Bell of Stamford, Connecticut, is all wet. And I believe John Wilstach's answer was quite perfect, and should settle, for once and all, about some of the so-called impossible tales told by our favorite authors in ARGOSY.

I believe A. W. Bell at one time was boss canvasman with "Seymour's Midnight Follies," and, if so, he has to be given credit, as he could sure do his part.

Why does one as he buy "our" magazine? He don't have to. If I didn't have my copy reserved I'd surely miss out as my dealer is always selling ARGOSY fast.

T. C. BRUNK.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City..... *State*.....

3-8

Looking Ahead!

Courtney Ryley Cooper

well-known author of circus stories makes his bow in **ARGOSY** ***with***

CAGED

A MOST unusual novel is this, a tale of New York's East Side—an insight into the criminal procedure of a great city—and through it all the lure and glamour of the circus.

Hugh Pendexter

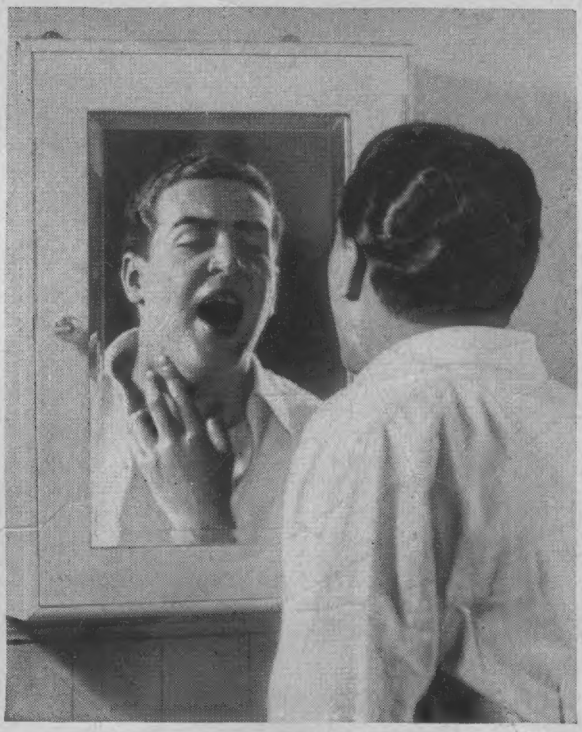
celebrated author of Western and historical fiction, steps into **ARGOSY** ***with***

BAD HOMBRES

A TALE of old Missouri in the days of the cattle quarantine; Texas cattlemen, trail herds, border ruffians—all in a tense and vivid novelette.

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF MARCH 15th

"I'll *whip* that sore throat *tonight*"



Never ignore sore throat or a chill; they may be a warning that you will be in for a severe cold, "flu," grippe, or bronchitis.

At the first symptom of trouble begin to gargle with full strength Listerine, the safe antiseptic. Used full strength it kills germs in 15 seconds.

The moment it enters the mouth it attacks disease-producing germs that cause trouble and thus aids nature in maintaining health. Listerine used full strength, though safe and pleasant, kills even the Staphylococcus Aureus (pus) and Bacillus Typhosus (typhoid) germs in counts ranging to 200,000,000. We could not make this statement unless prepared to prove it to the medical profession and U. S. Government.

For your protection make a habit of gargling with it systematically.

Lambert Pharmacal Co., St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

The *Safe* Antiseptic **LISTERINE**

Kills* 200,000,000 *germs in* 15 *seconds

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BEACH BALL ART. SERVICE
CHAS. LAW

Camels are made of the choicest tobaccos grown—cured and blended with expert care.

Camels are mild and mellow.

The taste of Camels is smooth and satisfying.

Camels are cool and refreshing.

The fragrance of Camels is always pleasant, indoors or out.

They do not tire the taste nor leave any cigaretty after-taste.

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